

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 7, 2014
8:32 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Mike Dunleavy, Vice Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bert Stedman

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Hollis French
Representative Lynn Gattis

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

INFORMATIONAL HEARING - DISCUSSIONS & PRESENTATIONS ON: "THE
COMMON CORE and ALASKA'S ACADEMIC STANDARDS"

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record.

WITNESS REGISTER

CHRIS MINNICH, Executive Director
Council of Chief State School Officers
Washington, D.C.

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of the "History,
Context & Current Implementation of Core Standards."

PAM GOINS, Director of Education Policy
Council of State Governments
Lexington, Kentucky

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented "Common Core State Standards: An
Overview of Policy Conditions in the States."

KATHLEEN PORTER-MAGEE, Senior Director

Thomas B. Fordham Institute
Washington, D.C.

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented "The State of State Standards."

SANDRA STOTSKY, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus
University of Arkansas
Department of Education Reform
Brookline, Massachusetts

POSITION STATEMENT: Addressed concerns with the Common Core State Standards.

JAMES MILGRAM, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus
Department of Mathematics
Stanford University
Stanford, California

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented "Comments on the Common Core Math Standards."

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented "Why Alaska Needs Internationally Comparable (Benchmarked) English Language Arts Standards."

SUSAN MCCAULEY, Ph.D., Director
Teaching & Learning Support
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented "Development & Overview of the Alaska's Academic Standards."

JIM MERRINER, CHAIR
Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented "Mission Statement & Adoption Efforts of Alaska's Academic Standards."

DANA THOMAS, Ph.D., Vice President
Academic Affairs
University of Alaska - Statewide System
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented "Vetting Alaska's Academic Standards: How They Address Remediation and the Gap Between Alaska's Secondary and Postsecondary Education Systems."

DIANE HIRSHBERG, Ph.D., Director
Center for Alaska Education Policy Research

Institute of Social and Economic Research
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented "Results of the Alaska Content Standards Validity Study."

ED GRAFF, Superintendent
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska,

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about how the Anchorage School District is implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

DARLA JONES, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent
Curriculum & Instruction
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska,

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about how the Anchorage School District is implementing the Common Core State Standards.

PETE LEWIS, Superintendent
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Fairbanks, Alaska,

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed implementing the Alaska Academic Standards in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District.

MELANIE HADAWAY, Coordinator
Secondary Curriculum
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Fairbanks, Alaska,

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed implementing the Alaska Academic Standards in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District.

PEGGY COWAN, Superintendent
North Slope Borough School District
Barrow, Alaska,

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced the North Slope Borough School District presentation.

LISA SKILES PARADY, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent
North Slope Borough School District
Barrow, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented "Implementation Efforts & Considerations at the District Level."

SUNNI HILTS, President
Association of Alaska School Boards
Seldovia, Alaska,

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified about implementation of the new Alaska Academic Standards.

NORM WOOTEN, Member
Kodiak Island School Board
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented "Implementation Efforts & Considerations at the District Level."

ACTION NARRATIVE

8:32:40 AM

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Dunleavy, Gardner, Huggins, and Chair Stevens.

Informational Hearing - Discussions & Presentations On: "The Common Core and Alaska's Academic Standards"

8:33:30 AM

CHAIR STEVENS commented on federal and state control of education as follows:

I think we can all agree in Alaska that we want to make sure that our students are prepared to compete in the world and compete in the United States. We want to have our students as prepared as possible when they go out into careers or into college education. The second thing that I assume most Alaskans still believe in is local control. I served for three years as a president of the local school board at home and I know how important that is. I know others have served on local school boards. We are always having confrontation with federalism and the issues of what rights belong to federal government and what rights belong to the state. I think generally there is a belief here that a lot of the rights that we had as states have been taken away by the feds over the years. We want to make sure that we control here in the state of Alaska our education.

8:34:30 AM

CHRIS MINNICH, Executive Director, Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), Washington, DC, said he will explain the basis of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) with multiple states working together. He said CCSSO is the membership organization

for commissioners of education across the United States. He noted that he was the CCSSO's Director of Membership and led the development of the CCSS prior to being CCSSO's Executive Director. He divulged that he was with the Oregon Department of Education where he led the state's standards and assessment work prior to being involved with CCSSO.

[8:35:49 AM](#)

MR. MINNICH explained that CCSSO is a membership organization and noted Commissioner Hanley from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) is a member of CCSSO.

He set forth that it is important to talk about the distinction between standards and the curriculum that is taught to get students to the CCSS. For example, a Common Core Standard is set for second graders to successfully estimate a measurement equation and noted that a teacher is not told how to have their students achieve the CCSS; it just says by the end of second grade a student needs to achieve the set goal. The latitude given to teachers allows for regional variances. In English Language Arts (ELA) that a Common Core Standard in second grade asks students to describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges. It is up to the teacher to find the appropriate story that allows students to achieve their CCSS. He emphasized that no one in the Common Core is told what they have to teach; that is local control and a very important part of the Standards Movement.

[8:37:18 AM](#)

He explained why the decision was made to develop CCSS. The first conversations were initiated with state superintendents in 2007 regarding the possibility of developing standards for ELA and mathematics. He said CCSSO was committed to clear and rigorous primary and secondary education (K-12) expectations for all students. He noted Senator Stevens pointed out that everyone agrees with the desire to have all students compete on a state and national level after K-12.

He said CCSSO noticed that standards dramatically varied from state to state. Alaska's standards were not at the highest levels across the country and every state needed to upgrade their standards. He remarked that all state superintendents recognized the need to upgrade standards.

He said a lot of time and effort was required whenever standards were revised. Oregon spent almost \$2 million every time their standards were upgraded and CCSSO felt that every state was

individually spending similar amounts. States found out that different expectations were being set and the consensus was for setting the CCSS on a multi-state level. He emphasized that the key was focusing on what the expectations should be, rather than how the subject matter was taught.

MR. MINNICH revealed that as states developed new CCSS criteria, advocacy groups and research institutions criticized the lack of quality in the standards and the lack of student growth achievement. States were criticized for low graduation rates and for graduating students who were being remediated at high rates and who were not ready for college.

[8:39:02 AM](#)

He said the business sector reminded states that schools were not graduating with the knowledge and skills aligned with the demands of the workforce. It was disheartening for CCSSO to receive the constant criticism while they were working hard to improve education opportunities for students.

He noted that one telling criticism that states were having challenges was with the difference between the results in the national assessment and the results on the individual state assessments. The numbers in Alaska mirrored what was going on in the rest of the country; but in 2011, 74.8 percent of students passed the Alaska State Math Test and 75 percent in ELA. On the National Assessment, 36 percent passed the mathematics, and 28 percent passed the ELA.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked for the specific name of the National Assessment.

MR. MINNICH replied the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).

[8:39:57 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS welcomed Senator French to the committee meeting.

MR. MINNICH explained that the differences between the Alaska Assessment Test and NAEP were hard to justify and Alaska was not the only state receiving criticism for the disparity. He said CCSSO and state governors felt the need to take action. States were asked to sign-on to a memorandum-of-understanding (MOU) that would allow CCSSO to create a set of standards that were higher than what was going on in states across the country.

State education leaders found partners in the National Governors Association (NGA) and CCSSO worked with NGA to develop CCSS. He said that states could choose whether to adopt or not and nobody was forcing any state to adopt CCSS.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked to clarify that there was no loss of federal money if a state did not adopt CCSS.

MR. MINNICH answered that there was no loss of federal money. He said he will address the federal incentive for extra money if CCSS was adopted.

[8:41:13 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver process will be addressed.

MR. MINNICH answered yes.

He said he will address how CCSS was developed and some of the misunderstandings. The standards were developed for and with the states. There were five public drafts with many more drafts that were circulated amongst state teachers and state departments of education. He said CCSSO was trying to get the best standards amongst states and among the world. He explained that CCSSO was relying on the expertise of teachers, content experts, and states. Feedback was provided by the business community, higher education groups, American College Testing (ACT) group, and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) group. He noted that the intent was to make sure that CCSS was consistent with college expectations.

He said he will address the academic standards being formed by the best standards in the states. He pointed out that Massachusetts had very high standards coming into CCSS. He noted that Massachusetts insisted that they not be required to adopt lowered standards during the CCSS writing process. Massachusetts adopted CCSS and the current standards are higher than previous standards. He emphasized that the CCSS focus has always been about higher expectations for kids. He noted that Alaska has taken CCSS and made the standards right for Alaska.

[8:43:04 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS remarked that the difference between the standards and the curriculum is a crucial issue. The committee's goal is to try to diffuse some of the criticism, miscommunication, and misunderstanding about CCSS. For example, people have claimed that the states will be teaching their children either pro-

abortion or anti-abortion and requiring papers to be written on the topics; the assertion was not accurate. He explained that the curriculum will specify to defend a position on an issue where there are definitely two sides. He said the curriculum never says that a student has to defend or oppose something that is a moral or political issue. He noted that a contentious issue might come into a classroom, but it is not an issue that will come through the curriculum.

MR. MINNICH commented that the standard in Chair Steven's example would be to defend an opinion and the CCSS would not say what the opinion is. He added that the teacher or school district would decide on the topic. He said the curriculum is what is taught to students and the standards themselves are just the expectations of students.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if there is any direct link between the standards and a curriculum. She explained that her understanding is the CCSS are just that and every state in the union can have their own curriculum without having to buy into anything.

MR. MINNICH answered correct. There is always a link where the state has to teach the standards, but a state can have whatever curriculum. He explained that it was more appropriate in a state like Alaska that requires a curriculum to meet the state's needs. He asserted that there should be no reason why a curriculum would be specified. He explained that the distinction between standards and curriculum is important. A lot of criticism has been based on the assumption that teachers will be told what to teach or forcing certain things to happen in the classroom. He assured this was not happening in CCSS.

[8:45:48 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if there is recommended curriculum by some of the major textbook companies.

MR. MINNICH answered that some states do adopt curriculum. He noted that Alaska does not adopt curriculum and districts would make the choice.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if there are some textbook companies that are developing curriculum to support CCSS.

MR. MINNICH answered yes. He explained that developing curriculum made sense because CCSS was going on in 46 states.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if developing curriculum was a different practice by the textbook companies. She queried if textbook companies typically tailor their work to the greatest market.

MR. MINNICH answered that textbook publishers were usually using Texas, California, and New York standards due to market size.

[8:47:55 AM](#)

He emphasized that the federal government played no role in developing CCSS. He pointed out that he was in the middle of the development of CCSS and there was no one from the federal government during the development phase. The federal government was not involved in any of the decision making in developing CCSS. The federal government did encourage states to use CCSS by awarding a small number of points for those using a common set of standards in the Race to the Top (RTTT) Program. Alaska did not apply for RTTT and there is no meaningful incentive for Alaska to do anything around CCSS from the federal government. He added that there is no link to federal Title I or Title II money and the federal government is not withholding money if states do not adopt CCSS.

He said ultimately CCSS should be a choice about what is best for Alaska, and Alaskans should be making the decisions. He noted that he has provided testimony in multiple committees where he has repeatedly said CCSS is about what is best for the state and that was the idea from the very beginning. He asserted that CCSSO's only goal was to get states to raise their standards across the country. He said CCSSO has been able to raise standards fairly successfully. However, CCSS has created a political controversy that CCSSO is hopeful to see its way through.

He announced that he would address the waiver process that Senator Dunleavy brought up. He said there were two options in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver process. He explained that a state could either adopt CCSS or have their universities validate their standards. He summarized that there were other options of how a state would get an NCLB waiver other than adopting CCSS. Nowhere in federal policy does the federal government refer to CCSS; it is all college and career readiness standards.

He noted that four states have not adopted CCSS: Alaska, Nebraska, Virginia, and Texas. All four states have upgraded their standards and have not used CCSS as the final set of standards, but the states have gone through a process that has

enabled them to have higher standards. He reiterated that the CCSSO's goal at the very beginning was to get states to raise their standards. He said CCSSO is very pleased with what Alaska has done in the common core process.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked to verify that there were two methods by which a state could apply for the waiver process: adopt CCSS in totality or have a state's universities set academic standards to get into college.

MR. MINNICH answered yes.

[8:49:51 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked to verify that Alaska went with Option 2.

MR. MINNICH answered that he was pretty sure Alaska did go with Option 2.

CHAIR STEVENS noted that national newspaper headlines have stated that other states are now backing out of the CCSS process. He asked Mr. Minnich to bring the committee up to date on the political scene regarding CCSS.

MR. MINNICH answered that no states have withdrawn from CCSS and 46 states are using CCSS. Most of the pushback comes from the concern with the federal government getting too involved. He disclosed to the committee that he shared the "federal government involvement" concern because CCSSO represents state commissioners. State commissioners, as a whole, are very concerned about the federal government having too much control over what is going on in the states. State legislators will have conversations pertaining to federal government involvement. He asserted that whether or not a state pulls out of CCSS is not the issue to focus on, but the focus should be on higher standards for students. He noted that there are benefits for having the same standards because shared textbooks and standards will allow students in Alaska to more easily get into college in Washington or Oregon; however, that does not necessarily mean that a state cannot raise its standards without using CCSS and that is what Alaska has actually done. He explained that Alaska started with CCSS and went through a feedback process to enable a solid set of standards.

[8:51:27 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked when all of the education commissioners or their delegates were meeting during the CCSS process, if any states found the process or the whole idea of CCSS

objectionable. She inquired if state objections to CCSS occurred during or after the process, whether or not a state signed on.

MR. MINNICH replied that Texas and Alaska were the two states that did not sign on originally; at that point there was some concern that the federal government would get involved. He remarked that the only state that was adamantly opposed was the state of Texas.

SENATOR GARDNER asked to clarify that when Alaska and Texas did not sign originally, the states did not participate in the CCSS discussions.

MR. MINNICH answered that Alaska and Texas were enabled to participate in the CCSS discussions; the two states just did not sign the agreement. He said CCSSO sent drafts to the Alaska Commissioner's office; they did several review sessions and gave feedback from Alaska's teachers on the CCSS. He stressed that Alaska did a separate process of review for their Alaska Academic Standards (AAS).

[8:52:53 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked who determined the methods for the CCSS waiver process.

MR. MINNICH replied that Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education did. He commented that the involvement of Secretary Duncan has spurred conclusions that the federal government is involved in CCSS.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY responded that his concern is the University of Alaska has determined the state's standards by validating the AAS. He explained that CCSS was the template and the state "Alaskanized" the AAS with the university system's approval.

MR. MINNICH concurred that Senator Dunleavy's explanation was the process used.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked what would happen if the state's university system did not approve the AAS.

MR. MINNICH remarked that the situation Senator Dunleavy described has not occurred. There would be a problem if a state has a set of standards in K-12 that is not preparing students for its university system.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY questioned if the AAS are geared to prepare students for the university system.

MR. MINNICH countered that the standards also prepared students for careers. There are a set of careers in Alaska that are very important to the state's economy; those particular careers should be part of the standards process.

[8:54:17 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY responded that the assumption is if the standards are good enough for the university, the standards are good enough for blue-collar or military careers.

MR. MINNICH answered that he did not agree with Senator Dunleavy's assessment. He explained that the AAS process included more than just the University of Alaska. The Secretary of Education required a connection to higher education.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY stated that he did not want to belabor the point regarding Alaska's university involvement with AAS. He noted that the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) will have their opportunity to address the AAS process.

MR. MINNICH stated that Senator Dunleavy is on the right issue of getting standards that are at the correct level for careers and higher education in the state; CCSSO had the same goal with CCSS. He explained that Alaska did their process and made AAS work for Alaska.

He addressed state ownership of standards. There have been a lot of comments regarding who owns CCSS and the ability for states to do what they want with CCSS. Alaska is a great example of being able to change the standards if a state is interested in doing so. There are no standards-police who check a state's standards. States are in full control of their own standards and use their own process to adopt CCSS. He explained that Alaska went through a process with the State Board of Education to adopt their standards. He pointed out that CCSS adoption also included the option to add specific pieces. He said the CCSS adoption did not have a binding commitment for the states with CCSSO, the National Governors Association (NGA), or anyone else. He emphasized that the choice for CCSS adoption will always remain the choice of the state. The Alaska State Board of Education has control of AAS.

[8:56:21 AM](#)

He said there are benefits of being "common." He noted that Senator Gardner brought up the issue of textbooks. He said instructional materials and assessments developed with other states would be beneficial to the state of Alaska. One of CCSS's ideas is to try to get assessments that will enable students to be judged against national competition.

CHAIR STEVENS asked how CCSS started. He inquired if CCSS began with NGA.

MR. MINNICH replied that CCSS started in 2007 with the state of Florida. Florida's education commissioner noted an interest in rewriting the state's standards and asked if any other states were interested in joining the process to avoid duplicate efforts. He said CCSSO approached NGA and a decision was made to put out a call to see which states would want to write academic standards together. He said CCSS projected 10 to 15 states involved in the CCSS process and 48 states signed up to write CCSS. Texas and Alaska were the two states that did not sign up initially.

HE said the next process involved getting states to participate in the writing of CCSS. He related that 48 states were a lot of states to try and make happy during the CCSS writing process. The highest quality standards were used from states like Massachusetts in addition to internationally-based academic standards. The CCSS process was a two and half year process from the beginning to end. He disclosed that CCSSO did not think the CCSS process would be controversial because states had adopted standards all along. Oregon spent about \$2 million writing standards during his tenor with the state. He pointed out that Oregon tried to get news media coverage during the process and nobody paid attention. He remarked that CCSS with 46 states is receiving a lot of media coverage. The original impetus was the idea that the U.S. was falling behind as a country and the states were having lower expectations than they probably should.

CHAIR STEVENS welcomed Senator Hollis French to participate with the committee's proceedings.

SENATOR HUGGINS stated that CCSS was the beginning of the agent of change. He asked Mr. Minnich to describe the cycle of the academic standards change.

[8:59:22 AM](#)

MR. MINNICH answered that the new expectations really are just the first step. He asserted that the next stage has to be a

local conversation with school districts, given the time and space to make sure that teachers are being trained, lessons being taught are being upgraded, and higher expectations are being assessed. Assessments will be harder with fewer students initially meeting the new standards. Kentucky just went through the assessment process in 2010 and a big drop occurred in the first year with the number of students that were meeting the CCSS. The second year saw an increase in Kentucky's students meeting their standards. He noted that the pattern for a system change will show a small drop initially, followed by growth and achievement. If Alaska's teachers are similar to teachers in other states, the state's teachers really just want clarity of what the academic standards are with the belief that they can get students to the standards. He asserted that teachers need help to get students to meet the new standards.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked what happens in the teacher training phase with universities.

MR. MINNICH replied that one of the most important things is to make the universities understand what the new standards are. Universities have not always been the best at listening to what was going on across the country in K-12. He remarked that CCSSO is pushing with higher education associations to assist with changing the way teachers are being educated. Teachers have to be taught more in the classroom by spending more time with student teaching, have hands-on experience, and be taught how to deal one-on-one with parents and students. He said most places have somewhere between six months and a year of student teaching, CCSSO would like to see much more. He added that teachers should also receive continued professional development.

[9:02:08 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked about the increased academic standards' timeline-cycle and when results will be realized.

MR. MINNICH answered that Kentucky saw results in two years with more students meeting the CCSS. Miracles should not be expected within two years and the process should be thought of more as a cycle. Each state has a different timeline. He said he did not know what timeline was best for Alaska and each state is different. He divulged that he does not want his two-year-old child to get through high school with the current standards in the state of Virginia. He suggested that the state should be thinking about a three-to-four year transition to the new standards. Alaska's Commissioner of Education should ultimately provide the committee with a timeline.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked about the relationship between CCSS and RTTT.

MR. MINNICH replied that Alaska did not apply for RTTT. In the RTTT application process, states were given a small amount of points for participation in writing a set of common standards. He said most of the states that put in applications used CCSS as evidence to show participation. Funds provided to states for participation was extra money and not a title program. He reiterated that Alaska did not participate.

[9:04:13 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS said the U.S. ranked 26th or 27th amongst other nations in education. He added that Alaska ranked in the forties amongst other states. He asked if regrouping is possible if the data he noted was taken into account with a 65 percent achievement level in executing CCSS along with teaching training and other support necessities.

MR. MINNICH answered yes. He asserted that standards themselves are not going to teach kids; teachers have to be helped to teach kids. He said the CCSS and AAS set a high bar for students. Dedication to getting students and teachers to the higher levels will lead to regrouping in state orders. He mentioned Massachusetts as the best example where high standards were set in the early '90s and the state was not the highest ranked in the country when the change was made. Massachusetts became the number one ranked state ten years after their standards change with the state remaining ranked as the highest. He explained the importance of dedicating to the CCSS and really being willing to say the standards are the right things for students when it gets hard. Dedicating to higher standards will be hard politically at times. He encouraged the committee to think about AAS as an important goal for students.

[9:06:04 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY noted that Mr. Minnich mentioned that internationally the U.S. should do better. He asked if there was any study done in terms of correlation between CCSS and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

MR. MINNICH replied that CCSSO looked at PISA.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Mr. Minnich to explain PISA.

MR. MINNICH answered that PISA is an international assessment given by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED). He said PISA's recent results ranked the U.S. in the 20's. He explained that PISA noted in their recent study that implementing CCSS should result in growth by the U.S. in PISA.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY noted Senator Huggins addressed what the next steps were with AAS and Mr. Minnich replied that universities have to change teacher training. He set forth that universities were the very group that validated AAS. He asked if the universities were actually changing internally to do exactly what was discussed.

MR. MINNICH answered that Senator Dunleavy's question was outside of the scope of his testimony. He encouraged the state to think about how it is dealing with higher education as a separate issue, whether Alaska had CCSS or not. He asserted that higher education should be getting better across the U.S. Higher education has to train teachers better and be more relevant to what is going on in K-12 classrooms. He remarked that Senator Dunleavy's question is not a CCSS issue, but should be considered a training issue for universities across the U.S.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY reiterated that the university system validated AAS. He noted that the focus is on all students being prepared to go into college if they so choose. He agreed that addressing the universities is an internal issue for the state to deal with. He asserted that the university systems have to be prepared for those incoming students.

MR. MINNICH replied that Senator Dunleavy is on to something and the issue is really important. He explained that he did not know enough about Alaska's university system to answer Senator Dunleavy's question.

9:09:04 AM

SENATOR GARDNER stated that she had attended previous CCSS meetings through the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the Education Commission of the States (ECS). The key emphasis from the meetings in improving student outcomes is not only high standards, but also really effective teachers. Part of the effectiveness of teachers is to have more time as student teachers and a more rigorous course load for teachers. She mentioned Kentucky as an example of a state that implemented CCSS and made progress in two or three years. She asked what role effective teacher training has in Kentucky's making

progress. She called attention to previous testimony where the state of Maryland presented their systematic way of mentoring new teachers and supporting building-by-building in supporting new teachers.

MR. MINNICH identified Maryland, Massachusetts, Kentucky, and Tennessee as states that have a systematic way of bringing new teachers into the system. There are states where a person gets a sense that teachers just get thrown into the classroom in year one and learn as they go. States have really changed the way they are doing things. He noted that CCSSO did a report about teacher training and made ten recommendations to states about what they should be doing.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if Mr. Minnich had any closing comments.

MR. MINNICH replied that he appreciated the detail level of the questions posed to him. He noted that the committee members have done their homework. He summarized that his goal was to simply try to get some facts on the table about the process CCSSO went through in developing CCSS. He explained that the committee will hear from opposition in the day's meeting and noted that there are issues worth debating. He asked the committee to focus on the issue of how to get students to the CCSS. Upcoming presentations by the school districts in Alaska will show that a good job is being done in implementing AAS.

[9:11:43 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked Mr. Minnich to address student drop-outs and the net effect when college-oriented standards are moved.

MR. MINNICH replied that drop-outs are a national plague. The career-side of the conversation is really important and there has to be relevance for students who drop out. He emphasized that drop-outs have to have a reason to come back to the classroom. He said curriculum is important and not the standards. Kids are starting to see how what is being taught in classrooms is connected directly to a job. Career-tech education is one of the major ways to solve the drop-out conversation so that the non-college student after high school has options.

[9:13:13 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Mr. Minnich for his testimony. He commented that he had received calls regarding the perception of "stacking the deck" and only presenting one side of the Common Core issue. He asserted that his intention has been to get comments from all sides of every issue. There will be an

opportunity at tomorrow's committee meeting for anyone to speak with the intent that everyone has had an opportunity to give their opinion and their take of what is going on.

9:14:08 AM

At ease from 9:14 a.m. to 9:18 a.m.

9:18:36 AM

CHAIR STEVENS called the committee back to order.

PAM GOINS, Director of Education Policy, Council of State Governments (CSG), Lexington, Kentucky, said she would talk about the legislative role in CCSS adoption and implementation. She explained that she would provide background on what CSG has seen across the country with state legislatures. She noted that she was a director of CSG's "Center for Innovation and Transformation Education." She said CSG allows for a great opportunity and perspective to bring all three branches together to address CCSS conversations: states' departments of education, states' boards of education, and states' legislators. She noted that she is a parent of a fifth grader and explained that CSG's location in Lexington, Kentucky, allows her to watch the state's progression with adoption and implementation of CCSS. It has been very interesting to see what is happening in the classrooms, talk with teachers to learn about CCSS, address teachers' professional development, and to see assessment scores change to the new CCSS, from a parent's perspective.

MS. GOINS stated that she will share what is happening with the legislature. She noted that the committee has heard about the emphasis on "college and career readiness." However, CSG really wants to say "college workforce and life readiness" because that is critical and demands more from students than ever before. Remedial courses continue to be necessary before students can take credit-bearing courses once they enter college and higher education. Also, CSG continues to hear from business and industry that they cannot find employees who can think critically, communicate, problem solve, collaborate, and have a basic ability to read and write effectively. The same skills noted by business and industry are missing in the college classrooms. She said CCSS will better prepare all students to be successful in college and careers through deeper, more rigorous, and clearer expectations for the learner. CCSS will emphasize more complex content and the development of real-world skills with authentic purpose. CCSS will ultimately lead to job creation, economic development, and prosperity for the state.

She continued that AAS will allow teachers, administrators, students, and parents to use a common language by preparing the best educational environment for the state's students. Beyond the in-state commonality, Alaska also has an opportunity to learn what is happening around the country and share the good work happening in Alaska. The world opens up for a classroom teacher when they can obtain lesson plans, textbooks, and other materials to customize instruction for their students.

[9:21:35 AM](#)

MS. GOINS addressed the policymaker's role in the CCSS adoption process. She pointed out that 41 states lean to their state boards of education or boards of regents. The chief state officers have been given the authority to authorize CCSS in North Dakota, New Mexico, and Wisconsin. American Samoa authorizes CCSS by executive order through their governor. She remarked that the legislature plays a key role in Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, and Minnesota. She noted that the state of Washington only adopted the English Language Art (ELA) standards.

She remarked that there seems to be some growing misconception about what an academic standard really is. Mr. Minnich talked about the purpose of the CCSS statements and expectations. She detailed that CCSS are not curriculum or curriculum materials, but rather a rigorous roadmap of what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.

She said standards are not new to states; the standards movement happened years ago. The national movement to utilize a common set of standards is new and the focus now is on creating and preparing students for college, work force, and life. She noted that the committee heard that academic standards alone do not take a student to the next level. It takes a well-rounded curriculum, classroom materials, professional development for teachers, formative and summative assessments, and a large cultural shift in the school to guide students to their own self-directed learning using a teacher as their guide.

[9:23:19 AM](#)

She reviewed Kentucky's process, noting the state's landmark legislation happened before CCSS ever came to be. Governor Steve Beshear signed Senate Bill (KY-SB) 1 into law in March 2009. She said KY-SB 1 was a foundational piece of legislation which really changed and transformed Kentucky's entire state educational system; it focuses on college and career readiness in addition to degree completion. She revealed that KY-SB 1

mandated the Department of Education, the Board of Education, and the Council on Postsecondary Education to come together as three previously separated agencies and develop a unified plan to reduce college remediation rates by at least 50 percent by 2014. KY-SB 1 also requires an increase in college completion rates of those students who were in developmental and remedial education by 3 percent annually from 2009 to 2014. She noted that KY-SB 1 adoption served as a critical foundation to move forward when CCSS were adopted at a later date.

[9:24:28 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked if Kentucky is on track to accomplish their goals by 2014.

MS. GOINS replied that the numbers look really good and an annual progression has been achieved.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if Kentucky provided additional funding to school districts to reach for their goals or if the school districts were expected to make the changes at the same funding levels.

MS. GOINS responded that there were some appropriations in Kentucky's budget to assist the local school districts. She said Kentucky House Bill (KY-HB) 37 on the Districts of Innovation comes with some funding as well. Districts can apply to be a District of Innovation to ask for forgiveness from some state board requirements in addition to some statutory and regulatory requirements.

SENATOR GARDNER asked to clarify that in the effort to achieve the new goals, districts in Kentucky are asking for exemptions from some standards and regulatory requirements.

MS. GOINS said that was correct.

SENATOR GARDNER replied that districts' obtaining exemptions was very interesting.

MS. GOINS explained that Kentucky has 175 school districts and 4 districts have been approved to be a District of Innovation. Those districts are doing remarkable and some of the following: dual enrollment - transporting students from school to the local college or community college while they have internet on their school bus to do some other high school work; proficiency; based and competency-based learning with problems; and taking teachers from higher performing schools into lower performing schools in

the Louisville School District. School districts actually apply to the State Board of Education and ask to be exempt from certain regulatory and statutory requirements of the state. A great deal of oversight comes from the commissioner at the state level. She said the District of Innovation program is in its second years and test scores will provide a status update as the program moves forward.

[9:26:47 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER addressed Kentucky's strategy to move high performing teachers to low performing schools. She asked how the high performing teachers were moved, if the transfers are involuntary, and whether teachers are provided with an incentive to transfer.

MS. GOINS replied that the school districts sought teachers who are high performing and have great test scores from their students. She explained that high performing teachers are asked to mentor other teachers directly in the classroom, as co-teachers in classrooms, or with the use of the internet with video calls.

She continued with more examples of what is happening to Kentucky with the unified plan that KY-SB 1 put into place. There is a huge emphasis on advanced placement and opportunities for increased dual-credit. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) is a huge focus as Kentucky boosts opportunities for students and teachers pushing towards the STEM fields. She noted that there are also targeted interventions happening for those students who are not on track for college or career-readiness.

[9:28:24 AM](#)

She addressed the state of Washington and noted the state's legislature being a part of the implementation and adoption process. The Washington State Legislature provisionally adopted CCSS in 2010 and gave some very direct feedback to the state's Department of Education during the adoption process. Cost and benefit analysis occurred with Washington's policymakers and stakeholders. The Washington State Legislature formally adopted CCSS the following year and the state is on a good projection to continue their efforts. Washington provided a lot of support during the three-year transition process for special populations that included students with disabilities and English Language Learners. She said CCSS for Washington, in the present and future, entails looking at bringing leadership teams together,

providing new assessments, and keeping the statewide steering committee together to address CCSS success.

9:30:00 AM

MS. GOINS addressed Maine and noted CCSS adoption was a legislative act. She said Maine knew that more than 50 percent of their students were entering community colleges with the need to take developmental remedial courses without the ability to go straight in to a credit bearing course. Maine put their emphasis on college, career, and civic life. Maine's business and industry was very vocal on its inability to employ skilled people. The Maine Legislature put CCSS in place in 2011 and the event became known as "Maine's Learning Revolt Standards." She noted that more and more states are emphasizing state standards in CCSS as Alaska has done.

She addressed what is happening in legislatures. She explained that there was a flurry of activity in 2010 as states were adopting CCSS. Legislatures in many states asked for the CCSS process to slow down and allow for legislative involvement. Legislatures were not aware of what the standards were or what action the states had taken. However, after more education took place with policymakers, the legislative action really started to heat up. Although the majority of states rely on their state boards of education, there are far reaching implications that the legislature needs to be aware of: state assessments, teacher evaluation systems, accountability, funding for local school districts, and appropriations. The legislature is a vital stakeholder in academic standards. Alaska's legislature oversees the educational systems from early learning to K-12 and postsecondary education. She asserted that the legislature's role in understanding the standards that impact and align with the state's educational goals in strategic planning is critical.

She said in 2012 there were approximately 120 unique bills related to CCSS, but that number surged to almost 300 in 2013. She noted examples of bills that were enacted by western states as follows:

In California, through Assembly Bill 86, there was a one-time appropriation of \$1.25 billion and it is specifically to help the local education agencies and the implementation of the Common Core, new investments in professional development technology. Also in California, the [State Schools] Chief must monitor the quality of the standards based curriculum that is being implemented and then they put a specific

emphasis on English Language Learners as well. There was another \$1.1 million in California appropriated to improve the teaching quality related to the new standards. In Colorado, Senate Bill 87 was a supplemental appropriation to the Department of Education to create the Colorado Student Assessment Program aligned to the Common Core; so they took the role to say these new standards must be directly aligned to the Common Core. In Hawaii, House Bill 200 funded the Department of Education to implement a pilot-program designed to help the state meet the new standards.

[9:33:37 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS welcomed Representative Lynn Gattis to the committee meeting. He noted that Representative Gattis is the Chairperson of the House Education Committee.

MS. GOINS continued to note unique CCSS related bills in western states as follows:

Idaho Senate Bill 1200 was funding for the Public Schools Educational Support Program and this was nearly \$1.6 billion put into the fund for the fiscal year 2014, and \$3.8 million specifically for professional development in training on Idaho's Core Standards. In Nevada we saw a couple of bills, one requiring the P-16 Council to determine whether or not their teachers in the schools are understanding and teaching the curriculum required by the Common Core. Also, the State Chief has to select a standardized curriculum-based college entrance exam to replace the High School Proficiency Test, which also requires the State Board to determine the course of the study that is aligned to the Common Core subject areas. In New Mexico, House Bill 2 gave a special appropriation to the State Education Agency for the development of a statewide formative Common Core related assessment; they also gave \$365,000 for the purchase and development of new information technology to support implementation and assessment of college readiness standards in a varied diverse and culturally difficult geographic region of New Mexico. As you will hear as the day goes on today and tomorrow with the assessments and the use of technology in digital learning, New Mexico put this funding directly to boost the use of technology, the broadband width, in

ensuring students had access to that technology. In North Dakota, they are aligning statewide achievement tests with the Common Core.

[9:35:48 AM](#)

In Oregon, they established the Network of Quality Teaching and Learning, which specifically looks at teacher quality, student achievement, and how they are implementing the Common Core. In Utah, they are looking at their LEA's or their local school district and their charter schools as well, to administer college readiness assessments and admission tests that includes language arts, math, and science standards that are most commonly accepted by most universities in the state. Washington extended their 2012 deadline for the State Chief to issue an estimate of the cost for implementing the Common Core and in doing so they must get public input and feedback regarding the recommendation to enhance those standards.

[9:36:40 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked about the state of Washington's cost estimate.

MS. GOINS replied that she has not seen the final report of exactly what amount Washington came up with.

She said Wyoming also looked at extending a timeline that is legislature-established for phase 1 of their new accountability system, which has a direct correlation to implementation of the Common Core.

She asserted that Alaska's legislature certainly knows that the Common Core implementation has budget implications, but the key is that the legislature shows support for implementation with fidelity. One of the key opportunities with the Common Core is to have a common set of high expectations for all students; but they must be implemented with fidelity. She advised the Alaska Legislature to look at redirecting funds to districts to support implementation and to review available funding streams for teacher professional development. Alaska is already training its teachers, looking at the professional development components, and how the Department of Education's is involved. She remarked that Alaska possesses vast Common Core opportunities to learn and share with neighboring states.

[9:38:15 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said Alaska is going through a lot of difficult times fiscally and noted that the House has established a task force to try to find ways to reduce the costs of education. He explained that the task force set forth that the state needs to look at a reduction of monies going into education. He asked Representative Gattis if his assessment was fair.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTIS replied that Chair Stevens' assessment was not fair. She explained that the task force's preliminary report indicated that Alaska needs to find newer and different ways of thinking. Alaska has an education system that the legislature created over time. She asserted that if the legislature does not change the education system, then the state will be forced to fund the system.

CHAIR STEVENS replied that the point is Alaska's legislature is taking a look at the cost of education and at the same time addressing budget implications regarding the Common Core. He asked Ms. Goins for her comments on his statement.

[9:39:23 AM](#)

MS. GOINS replied that Alaska is already spending the money for teacher training and professional development. She said the state should look at its education funding streams coming in and opportunities for school districts to apply for funding through different opportunities.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if Ms. Goins is finding that the universities are changing their approaches to anything. He said it sounds like the state is starting to lineup two historically different systems. He asserted that the K-12 system is becoming a feeder-program for universities or the "minor league" for universities when the two groups have disparate missions. He said the argument in the past is that Alaska's kids were not prepared for the university; but there are two different missions. He asked if Ms. Goins is finding that the universities are changing their approach to things. He noted that Alaska used to have a community college concept that really does not exist anymore.

MS. GOINS replied that converting higher education institutions has been a slow process. Universities initially felt that they were not part of the conversation with the Common Core. She said universities are now given the message that the CCSS process requires their participation.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY noted that the university just validated Alaska's standards.

MS. GOINS replied that she was talking nationally in the conversation as a whole. Just as the legislature felt very frequently that they were not a part of that initial conversation as the standards were being developed, the same is true from higher education. Universities are certainly onboard with the Common Core with the understanding that CCSS is critical for graduating K-12 students that are college and career-ready. She remarked that the aspiration for a quick turnaround has not occurred and the change process is going to be a slower-moving process for higher education systems. Universities are certainly looking at the Common Core and analyzing requirements for training teachers. She said it is critical that higher education institutions, state boards, and licensors come together and talk about how teachers need to be trained as they enter the classrooms.

[9:41:58 AM](#)

She said the Council of State Governments (CSG) was asked to compile a policy-framework for deeper learning, critical thinking, and an inquiry-based approach by students. In addition, CSG was asked to identify what the state legislative role is. She explained that a national group of experts was assembled comprised of legislators, state chiefs, state board of education members, and local implementers. CSG asked the expert group to identify what to say to legislators regarding college, career, workforce, and life readiness. Recommendations from the expert group fall around five major policy areas:

1. Curriculum and instruction
2. Teacher professional development
3. Teacher and leader effectiveness
4. The use of time
5. Assessments and accountability

MS. GOINS explained that the recommendations are a roadmap of opportunities for state legislatures to consider as they have academic standards conversations in transforming educational systems.

[9:43:29 AM](#)

She said she would leave the committee with some questions. She explained that in many states the boards and departments of education lead the way on local school districts' academic standards. However, the state legislatures have to be a major

player in the standards conversation. She reviewed guiding questions she used when talking with Commissioner Hanley and individuals from preschool to higher education as follows:

- How can we look at state licensure requirement?
- How can we ensure that our educators can demonstrate mastery of the Common Core for that initial licensure as well as renewal?
- How can postsecondary change their courses and program approval standards so that pre-service teachers are showing competency in standards, ensuring that they can deliver the instruction in the classroom?
- How can your funding provide some support for more rigorous teacher evaluation systems that include the Common Core?
- What about revealing, amending, or changing professional development? Again, this is something that goes on school year by school year that making it much more focused on your academic standard; how that connects to the curriculum, the curriculum materials, and the instructional strategies.
- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of that professional development?
- Can you consolidate any of your services here in the state to free up some of those monies we were just talking about?
- Can you purchase more collectively?
- Can you look more as a state to offer resources for CCSS implementation and professional development?
- How can you possibly incentivize local school districts to share or consolidate their services?

[9:45:12 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY specified that Alaska did not adopt Common Core.

MS. GOINS replied that Alaska has AAS and college and career readiness standards.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY stated that Alaska is going to substitute AAS for CCSS.

MS. GOINS answered correct. She explained that the Common Core is that high expectation set of standards for all students and Alaska has done that with AAS.

CHAIR STEVENS replied the Alaska State Standards.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY recommended a new acronym.

MS. GOINS addressed policy enactment for the use of time as follows:

We are seeing so much more problem-based learning and competency-based learning for students that requires now learning both inside and outside of the classroom. So, can you take a look at opportunities to provide credit for students that are not necessarily a "seat time" or a Carnegie Unit? How can you be flexible with your schedules, calendars, and class sizes? All of these things can come together for improving your budget outcomes as well. And then, as I talked about Kentucky in their "innovation zones," are you willing to do that here in Alaska to look at some of the districts to implement your state standards in more transformative ways? Finally, how do you engage other key stakeholders? Certainly today is one way of doing that, but engaging the stakeholders in this discussion. Your academic standards will always be here for your students. I applaud you for raising the expectations for all of your students. We can be a resource to you at CSG and I would certainly be glad to do so.

[9:47:12 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER said the meeting is about trying to improve educational outcomes for all kids across Alaska and nationwide, too. She noted hearing a lot of previous testimony about the importance of early childhood education and pre-K programs. She said she was surprised that there was no mention, whatsoever, about pre-K during discussions about policymakers, leadership roles, and system assessments. She asked if not mentioning pre-K is intentional.

MS. GOINS replied that not mentioning pre-K was not intentionally left off of the table because early learning is critical, whether it be in a childcare setting, head start, or pre-school formal programs. She said pre-K is critical to prepare students for kindergarten and beyond. She noted that CSG's initial CCSS focus for state legislatures was on K-12. She said CSG understands that the conversation has to also address pre-school, early learning, as well as postsecondary. She

explained that her presentation to the committee was a result of CSG's focus group looking at K-12 education.

[9:48:28 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if there were representatives from the University of Alaska (UA) at the committee meeting.

CHAIR STEVENS replied that UA representatives will be present during the afternoon meetings, as well as online.

SENATOR HUGGINS noted that input from UA is an important component. He remarked that Alaska's stakeholders need to be advised on academic standards at the same time. Alaska has a history where accreditation was unfortunately lost for one of the state's teacher producing bases. The state went through the "agent of change" and the practice exam and the requirement for a five-year education. He asserted that the state was back where it started with a four-year education requirement. He said the state has migrated back to where it began.

He called attention to Senator Dunleavy's remarks regarding the Alberta Model for learning. He asked if Ms. Goins had taken a look at the Alberta Model.

[9:49:38 AM](#)

MS. GOINS answered that she was not familiar with the Alberta Model.

CHAIR STEVENS commented that he appreciates Senator Dunleavy's comments about the change that occurred in Alaska's universities by doing away with the community college system. He remarked that the community college system probably plays a very important role in Kentucky's ability to provide students with classes when they are in high school so that they can earn credit at college.

MS. GOINS answered yes. She explained that Kentucky's community colleges play an important role for students, as well as for businesses. She noted that businesses were doing much more in-sourcing with community colleges to train their own employees.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Ms. Goins.

[9:50:30 AM](#)

At ease from 9:50 a.m. to 10:02 a.m.

[10:02:19 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS called the committee meeting back to order.

KATHLEEN PORTER-MAGEE, Senior Director, Thomas B. Fordham Institute (TBFF), Washington, DC, explained that TBFF is a "right leaning" education policy think tank. She noted her background in policy work, in addition to rigorous standards implementation, in urban, Catholic, and public charter classrooms, both as a teacher and also as a network administrator.

MS. PORTER-MAGEE explained that she would address both the CCSS and the AAS that were in place prior to 2012. She said her hope is to explain why the CCSS is clearer and more rigorous than the vast majority of state standards and why it is superior to those that Alaska replaced in 2012. She detailed the CCSS and the AAS as follows:

For nearly two decades, state standards have been a cornerstone of our modern education system. State governments have long set minimum expectations for each grade level or grade band across all grades, K through 12. These are meant to ensure that all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, are held to the same rigorous standards. And there is ample evidence that, without clear objectives, teachers will often unconsciously raise or lower their own expectations based on the abilities and backgrounds of the students in front of them, rather than based on what will help ensure students are on path towards college or the workforce.

Yet, we have known for a long time that, in far too many states, including Alaska, the existing state standards set the bar far too low, leaving a content and expectations gap between schools and classrooms.

10:05:17 AM

But, are the Common Core the right solution to this problem? In order to answer that question, it's important to understand five facts:

1. The Common Core effort is, and has always been, a state-led effort to improve the quality and rigor of K-12 academic standards, of which Alaska leaders were initially full participants, and which is why Alaska was able to opt out of the CCSS without penalty.

2. The Common Core State Standards are significantly stronger than the Alaska standards that were in place prior to 2012.

3. Common Core English standards emphasize the importance of reading rigorous, high-quality literature in English class, plus non-fiction in history, science, and other courses.

4. The Common Core math standards prioritize the most important math content at each grade level, including a heavy dose of 'math facts' and arithmetic in the early grades.

5. Whether Alaska chooses to adopt or adapt the Common Core or not, educators will retain full control over curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy where it belongs – at the local level.

10:06:20 AM

Let's dive deeper into rigor of the standards themselves. If I leave you with nothing else, I really hope that I am successful in underlining this critical point: the Common Core is significantly clearer and more rigorous than the Alaska ELA and math standards that were in place prior to 2012.

We at the Fordham Institute have been evaluating state standards for more than 15 years. In 2010, we released a comprehensive review of the clarity and specificity and content and rigor of every state's existing ELA and math standards, along with our final evaluation of the Common Core. In that analysis, the Common Core earned a B-plus from our ELA experts and an A-minus from our math experts. In the same evaluation, Alaska's ELA and math standards earned an 'F' and a 'D' respectively.

Even still though, when the final version of the CCCSS were released in 2010, the standards were not meant to serve as the totality of the state's expectations, but instead to define the 'core' – the essential ELA and math knowledge and skills that students need to be college and career ready.

As leaders of the CCSS Initiative made clear at the time, states who adopted the Common Core were encouraged to customize the standards to meet their state's unique needs by adding state-specific features that build upon this Core; also to strengthen the standards so that the expectations meet the needs of the students and teachers in their state. Several states have done precisely that. In Massachusetts, for instance, the State Board of Education asked a committee of educators, including English teachers and university professors, to review the Common Core and compare them to the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework, which was widely considered to be the best in the nation. That committee unanimously recommended Common Core adoption because its members felt that the Common Core 'is unequivocal in its insistence upon academic rigor and high expectations for all students K-12.'

But their support came with some recommendations. They did not, for instance, want to lose Massachusetts's strong standards for pre-kindergarten, nor did they want to lose the guidance that was found in the state's list of exemplar texts. To address those and other concerns, the State Board of Education voted (also unanimously) to adopt the Common Core, but with several strategic additions. The Board added the Massachusetts pre-K standards; they added specific standards, including several that included important genre-specific content in ELA; and they included their own list of exemplar texts. That means that today, the Massachusetts Common Core standards look different than those that guide teaching and learning in other states. It also means that Massachusetts did not simply replace its previous strong standards with something less rigorous. It took the best of both and created something even stronger that kept them, in the words of Commissioner Mitchell Chester, 'Right where [they] should be, at the table with other states to collaborate on innovative curricular and instructional strategies that will benefit students and educators for years to come.'

[10:09:09 AM](#)

There are benefits from the 'commonness' of the Common Core that should be acknowledged. Teachers in Common Core states have access to a far greater number of

curricular and instructional resources, many of them free, than states in non-Common Core states. Indeed, because publishers, both large and small, have access to a larger market for Common Core-aligned materials, the possibility of innovation is far greater, whereas, in the past, educators were subject to the whims of a smaller number of textbook creators who were able to define quality and control the market. In the Common Core era, their monopoly has been challenged. And the result is teacher access to a far greater number of resources that can meet the needs of a more diverse set of learners. In addition, Common Core states have had the opportunity to collaborate with other states on assessment development and professional development in a way not possible for states who have not adopted the Common Core.

Of course, the benefits of the 'commonness' of the Common Core are less important than the quality of the standards themselves. But on this point again, let me be clear, the Common Core are among the clearest, most rigorous standards of any K-12 ELA and math standards in the nation or the English-speaking world. By choosing to leverage the Common Core and add to them the best of Alaska's previous standards, you have the opportunity to create a set of standards that will rival the best in the world. That is a goal worth shooting for and something that would position Alaska students where they need to be in terms of national and international competitiveness.

[10:10:24 AM](#)

As I mentioned earlier, we at the Fordham Institute have been evaluating state standards for more than 15 years. In 2010, we released a comprehensive review of the clarity and specificity and content and rigor of every state's existing ELA and math standards along with our evaluation of the final draft of the Common Core. In that analysis, the Common Core earned a B-plus from our ELA experts and an A-minus from our math experts. Even Sandra Stotsky, one of Common Core's fiercest critics, has acknowledged that, for most states, going backwards makes little sense, 'States are unlikely to want to return to the standards they once had;' because they would be rightly accused of returning to 'non-rigorous' standards.

When judged against international standards for ELA and math, the Common Core fares equally well. Between 2009 and 2010, we at the Fordham Institute reviewed the quality of the standards that provide the foundation for several national and international assessments: the [National Assessment of Educational Progress] (NAEP), the [Program for International Student Assessment] (PISA), and [Progress in International Reading Literacy Study] (PIRLS). In these comparisons, the Common Core outperformed all three. In short, these standards are not just internationally competitive; they are among the best in the world.

[10:11:35 AM](#)

In spite of this evidence of rigor of the Common Core, critics have spread countless myths about what the standards ask, who is behind them, and what they mean for our teachers and students. For the purposes of today's conversation, let me address four of the most prominent critiques to demonstrate how these attacks don't hold up under scrutiny.

First, many critics mistakenly believe that the Common Core inappropriately prioritize nonfiction over literature in language arts classrooms. This argument rests on two dubious assumptions or misrepresentations. First, many have either misread or deliberately misrepresent a two-paragraph section that appears on page 5 of the introduction to the Common Core. That introduction suggests that teachers should 'Follow NAEP's lead in balancing the reading of literature with the reading of informational texts, including texts in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.' Following NAEP's lead would mean that fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders would spend 50, 55, and 70 percent of their time (respectively) reading informational text.

Some have led people to believe that these percentages are meant to direct learning exclusively in English classrooms; but they are not. In fact, the Common Core immediately clarifies that 'The percentages reflect the sum of student reading, not just reading in ELA settings. Teachers of senior English classes, for example, are not required to devote 70 percent of reading to informational texts.' What high school

seniors read in history and science class would count as well.

That means that the only place where the Common Core explicitly mentions the amount of time teachers should spend on literary versus nonliterary reading is to clarify that literary study should dominate text selection in literature classrooms.

To be clear, though, the Common Core does ask for an increase in the amount of time and attention devoted to informational texts and to literary nonfiction, both in literature class and in science and social studies. But this is merely a correction to the distressingly small percentage of time currently devoted to reading the appropriately complex; content-rich informational texts that students need to build vocabulary and deepen comprehension. This is especially important in the elementary grades where students have almost no access to rigorous and interesting informational texts. In fact, research has suggested that has few as 10 percent of books in lower-elementary classroom libraries are informational, and that first graders spend as little as 3.6 minutes each day interacting with informational text. That puts them behind their international peers and does not equip them with the skills they need to succeed in a 21st century information economy. Yet reading informational texts, particularly in the early grades, is a well-documented way to increase academic and domain-specific vocabulary, two necessary elements of reading comprehension. This is precisely why education leaders like E.D. Hirsch are supportive of the Common Core; because the standards, if faithfully implemented, have the potential to bring content and rigor back to the curriculum.

[10:14:24 AM](#)

But the fear that informational texts will somehow supplant literary study in Common Core classrooms, rather than supplement it, is unfounded. The standards devote two entire appendices to helping to clarify text complexity and to outlining 'exemplar' texts that meet the standards' complexity requirements. And those exemplar texts address a variety of genres; they include works written by literary giants like Thoreau, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Harper Lee, and Nathaniel

Hawthorne. The small numbers of advanced technical documents included in these lists, while important, are dwarfed by the volume of great authors and works of literature and literary nonfiction that the Common Core holds up as exemplary.

In other words, while some suggest that the Common Core will lead to the end of great literature, the reality is that, for the past several decades, we've seen erosion in the quality and complexity of texts being assigned in schools. This dumbing down of the curriculum comes at a time when our students need rigorous preparation the most. The Common Core seeks to right that wrong by refocusing our attention on reading texts that are worth reading, and doing the kind of higher-order literary analysis that will prepare students for college-level work.

[10:15:26 AM](#)

A second common myth is that the Common Core standards promote low-level mathematical skills, or that they prioritize mathematical 'practices' or 'fuzzy math' over critical content. Again, a close reading of the standards reveals the opposite is true.

The Common Core math standards prioritize essential content and allow the time and space needed for deep mastery of that content. In the early grades, this means that arithmetic is heavily weighted and that students are asked to learn to automaticity their basic math facts; and that they are asked to master the standard algorithms. This is content they need to know—cold in order to be prepared for the upper level math work they will do in high school and beyond. If there is one thing we know with certainty is that math is cumulative. You can only move on to more advanced content until you have fully mastered essential prerequisite knowledge and skills.

Third, some critics complain that the Common Core don't require Algebra in the eighth grade, something that many think is essential to prepare students for advanced math in high school. The reality, however, is that the Kindergarten through seventh grade Common Core standards include all of the prerequisite content students will need to have learned to be prepared for Algebra I in the eighth grade. And that means that

it's the states, districts, and/or schools who decide for themselves course and graduation requirements.

10:16:40 AM

Finally, some argue that adoption of the Common Core—or any K-12 academic standards will usurp local control over curriculum and instruction. On the contrary, by setting standards, rather than adopting statewide curricula, state education leaders are ensuring that local district, school, and teacher leaders remain in control of the decisions that most directly impact the students they serve. On the ELA side, this means that local leaders and teachers can and will choose the texts students will read. It means that parents, teachers, and leaders still need to work together to define the 'content-rich curriculum' their children should be learning.

Standards set a minimum bar, a floor, not a ceiling. They are designed only to help define student outcomes to help ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn the content they need to succeed. But, educators still drive curriculum and instruction and leaders still make critical school-level decisions.

10:17:28 AM

In the end, Common Core is a classroom-level reform. It is meant to refocus planning, curriculum, and instruction on the things that matter most to reading comprehension: books that are worth reading; content that is worth learning; and reading and writing that is tied directly to both. Whether the promise of the Common Core is realized depends on whether leaders are able to look past the politics into the classroom and make decisions that are in the best interest of the students we all hope to serve.

10:17:56 AM

CHAIR STEVENS noted the importance to address the CCSS myths in detail. He inquired about the issue of local control and asked if there are many Alaska things the state would need to add to its curriculum that other states would not. He noted that Massachusetts has a little different curriculum.

MS. PORTER-MAGEE replied that there are a number of different things that are not included in the CCSS that a state might make the decision to add. She cited the pre-K standards as one

example. CCSS covers K-12 and does not include standards for pre-K. Massachusetts made the decision to include pre-K standards because the state had them in the past and felt the inclusion was critical. The Fordham Institute's evaluation of Alaska's previous standards found that the state had pre-K standards that were strong. She said pre-K would be an example of a standard that Alaska leaders might want to keep in the transition to new standards.

She noted another example is a state specific reading list or exemplar text list. She explained that CCSS contains Appendix B that has some examples of the quality and complexity of text that teachers might assign at each grade level. Appendix B is not part of the CCSS; it is just offered as an addendum. Massachusetts decided to adopt their Massachusetts Reading List, rather adopting Appendix B. Other states might choose to adopt their own reading list so that local authors are selected in the text exemplars that used schools.

She noted that there has been some controversy in some states where previous state standards may have required cursive writing; that is in no way incompatible with the requirements of CCSS and a state may choose to leave in state specific college and career-ready standards. She reiterated that Massachusetts and California chose to retain their state specific standards. She asserted that there are a number of things that state leaders might choose to prioritize and leave in their CCSS.

[10:20:43 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Ms. Porter-Magee. He remarked that he liked Ms. Porter-Magee's comment about minimum-bar floor and not a ceiling; often CCSS is looked at backwards.

[10:21:17 AM](#)

At ease from 10:21 a.m. to 10:29 a.m.

[10:29:44 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS called the committee back to order.

DR. SANDRA STOTSKY, Professor Emeritus, University of Arkansas, Department of Education Reform, Brookline, MA, addressed "Why Alaska Needs Internationally Comparable (Benchmarked) English Language Arts (ELA) Standards." She said the most relevant aspects of her experience include being the Senior Associate Commissioner in the Massachusetts Department of Education and helping to develop all the state's standards in K-12, a citizen

appointment for the Massachusetts Board of Education, and the Common Core's Validation Committee.

DR. STOTSKY provided the committee with the following prepared statement and paraphrased as follows:

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony to the Alaska State Senate Education Committee on Common Core's ELA standards and Alaska's current Academic Standards for ELA. I begin with remarks on Common Core's Validation Committee, on which I served from 2009-2010. I then offer comments on Common Core's and Alaska's current ELA standards. They appear to be identical, so comments on Common Core's standards apply to Alaska's current standards as well. As I talk, I will give examples relating to the vocabulary standards and reading standards for literary and informational texts because these are the most damaging of these ELA standards. I end with recommendations.

Common Core's K-12 standards, it is regularly claimed, emerged from a state-led process in which experts and educators were well represented. But the people who wrote the standards did not represent the relevant stakeholders. Nor were they qualified to draft standards intended to 'transform instruction for every child.' And the Validation Committee that was created to put the seal of approval on the drafters' work was useless if not misleading, both in its membership and in the procedures they had to follow.

She specified that the Validation Committee was supposed to be the committee that would make sure that whatever was developed would be internationally benchmarked, research based, and rigorous. She asserted that the Validation Committee could not in any way fulfill its obligations to ensure those kinds of qualities.

DR. STOTSKY continued with who was on the Validation Committee and paraphrased from her prepared statement as follows:

In the absence of official information to date from the two private organizations themselves, it seems likely that Achieve, Inc. and the Gates Foundation selected most of the key personnel to write the college-readiness standards. Almost all the members,

it turned out, were on the staff of Achieve, Inc. and three other test/curriculum development companies: American College Testing (ACT), America's Choice (a for-profit project of the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), and the College Board (CB). Not only did the Standards Development Work Group fail to include any high school mathematics teachers, it failed to include any English professors or high school English teachers. How could legitimate high school "college-readiness" standards in either subject be created without the very two groups of educators who know the most about what students should and could be learning in secondary mathematics and English/reading classes? Because the 24 members of the Standards Development Work Group labored in secret, without open meetings, sunshine-law minutes of meetings, or accessible public comment. Their reasons for making the decisions they did are lost to history.

[10:33:31 AM](#)

The absence of relevant professional credentials in the two grade-level standards-writing teams helps to explain the flaws in these standards. The "lead" writers for the grade-level ELA standards, David Coleman and Susan Pimentel, had never taught reading or English in K-12 or at the college level. Neither has a doctorate in English, nor has either of them ever published serious work on K-12 curriculum and instruction. Neither has a reputation for literary scholarship or research in education. At the time they were appointed, they were virtually unknown to English educators and higher education faculty in rhetoric, speech, composition, or literary study.

Two of the lead grade-level standards-writers in mathematics had relevant academic credentials for the subject. Jason Zimba was a physics professor at Bennington College at the time, while William McCallum was (and remains) a mathematics professor at the University of Arizona. The only member of this three-person team with teaching experience, Phil Daro, had majored in English as an undergraduate; he was also on the staff of NCEE. None of the three had ever developed K-12 mathematics standards before.

Who recommended these people as standards-writers and why, we still do not know. No one in the media

commented on their lack of credentials for the task they had been assigned. Indeed, no one in the media showed the slightest interest in the qualifications of the grade-level standards-writers. Nor did the media comment on the low level of college readiness they worked out.

Mr. Zimba is reported in the official minutes of a public meeting the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in March 2010 as saying: 'The concept of college readiness is minimal and focuses on non-selective colleges.' The video tape of the meeting provides the context for this statement¹. Mr. Zimba exemplified this statement in many ways, e.g., 'The minimally college-ready student is a student who passed Algebra II.' And [Common Core's document is] 'Not only not for STEM, it's also not for selective colleges.'

In contrast, Mr. Coleman and Ms. Pimentel have never explained in public how they defined college and career readiness in ELA or how they would exemplify its practical meaning with respect to the level of reading difficulty or specific texts students would have to demonstrate they understand. While Appendix B in the Common Core ELA document offers a range of titles in grades 11/12 indicating the 'quality and complexity' of texts that students should be able to read, the titles span such a wide range of reading levels in grades 11/12 that it is not clear what level constitutes 'college and career readiness.' Titles in grades 11/12 include *Dreaming in Cuban*, with a low middle school reading level according to a widely-known readability formula titled ATOS for Books, and Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*.

Who were members of the Validation Committee? The federal government could have funded an independent group of experts to evaluate the soundness and validity of the standards it was incentivizing the states to adopt, but it did not do so. Instead, NGA and CCSSO created their own Validation Committee (VC) in 2009 of 28 members to exercise this function. Some were *ex officio*, others were recommended by the governor or commissioner of education of an individual state. No more is known officially about the rationale for the individuals chosen for the VC. Similar to the

composition of the Standards Development Work Group and the standards-writing teams, the VC contained almost no academic experts on ELA and mathematics standards; most were education professors or associated with testing companies, from here and abroad. There was only one mathematician on the VC—R. James Milgram—although there were many mathematics educators on it (people with doctorates in mathematics education, appointments in an education school, and/or who worked chiefly in teacher education). I was the only nationally recognized expert on English language arts standards by virtue of my work in Massachusetts and for Achieve, Inc.'s American Diploma Project high school exit standards for ELA and back-mapped standards for earlier grade levels.

What was the purpose of the Validation Committee? Culmination of participation on the committee was reduced to signing or not signing a letter by the end of May 2010 asserting that the not-yet-finalized standards were:

1. Reflective of the core knowledge and skills in ELA and mathematics that students need to be college and career-ready.
2. Appropriate in terms of their level of clarity and specificity.
3. Comparable to the expectations of other leading nations.
4. Informed by available research or evidence.
5. The result of processes that reflect best practices for standards development.
6. A solid starting point for adoption of cross-state common core standards.
7. A sound basis for eventual development of standards-based assessments.

Professor Milgram and I were two of the four members of the VC who did not sign off on the standards. So far as we could determine, the Validation Committee

was intended to function as a rubber stamp in spite of the charge to validate the standards. Despite our repeated requests, we did not get the names of high-achieving countries whose standards were used as benchmarks for Common Core's because Common Core's standards were (intentionally) not internationally benchmarked (or made comparable to the most demanding sets of standards elsewhere). It did not offer any research evidence to support its omission of high school mathematics standards leading to STEM careers, its stress on writing over reading, its division of reading instructional texts into 'information' and 'literature,' its experimental approach to teaching Euclidean geometry, its deferral of the completion of Algebra I to grade 9 or 10, or its claim about the value of informational reading instruction in the English classes. It couldn't because there is no evidence to support Common Core's revision of the K-12 curriculum. Nor did Common Core offer evidence that its standards meet entrance requirements for most colleges and universities in this country or elsewhere—or for a high school diploma in many states. The lack of an authentic validation of Common Core's so-called college-readiness standards (that is, by a committee consisting largely of discipline-based higher education experts who teach undergraduate mathematics or English/humanities courses) before state boards or commissioners of education voted to adopt these standards suggests their votes had no legal basis.

[10:40:14 AM](#)

General Comments:

1. Most of Common Core's college-readiness and grade-level reading standards are content-free skills. Most of the statements that are presented as vocabulary, reading, and literature standards (where content would be indicated if it is indicated anywhere) point to no particular level of reading difficulty, little cultural knowledge, and few intellectual objectives. These statements are best described as skills or strategies when they can be understood at all and therefore cannot be described as rigorous standards. Here is one example. The Anchor Standard is: 'Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.' The grades 11/12 standard 'clarifying' this Anchor Standard is:

'Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explains how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.' This is clearly a free-floating skill and can be applied to anything from 'The Three Little Pigs' to Moby Dick.

Skills training alone doesn't prepare students for college. They need a fund of content knowledge. But Common Core's ELA standards (and its literacy standards for other subjects) do not specify the literary/historical knowledge that students need. The document provides no list of recommended authors or works, just examples of 'quality and complexity.' The standards require no British literature aside from Shakespeare. They require no authors from the ancient world or selected pieces from the Bible as literature so that students can learn about their influence on English and American literature. They do not require study of the history of the English language. Without requirements in these areas, students are not prepared for college coursework or a career (or active citizenship) in an English-speaking country.

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2. Common Core's ELA standards stress writing more than reading at every grade level—to the detriment of every subject in the curriculum. There are more writing than reading standards at almost every grade level in Common Core, a serious imbalance. This is the opposite of what an academically sound reading/English curriculum should contain, as suggested by a large and old body of research on the development of reading and writing skills. The foundation for good writing is good reading. Students should spend far more time in and outside of school on reading than on writing to improve reading (and writing) in every subject of the curriculum.

3. Common Core's writing standards are developmentally inappropriate at many grade levels. Adults have a much better idea of what 'claims,' 'relevant evidence,' and academic 'arguments' are. Most elementary children have a limited understanding of these concepts and find it difficult to compose an argument with claims and evidence. It would be difficult for children to do so even if Common Core's writing standards were linked

to appropriate reading standards and prose models. But they are not. Nor does the document clarify the difference between an academic argument (explanatory writing) and opinion-based writing or persuasive writing, confusing teachers and students alike. Worse yet, Common Core's writing standards stress emotion-laden, opinion-based writing in the elementary grades. This kind of writing does not help to develop critical or analytical thinking, and it establishes a very bad habit in very young children. There is no research evidence to support this kind of pedagogy.

10:43:20 AM

4. Common Core expects English teachers to spend at least half of their reading instructional time at every grade level on informational texts—a percentage from which students cannot benefit intellectually. Common Core lists 10 reading standards for informational texts and 9 standards for literary texts at every grade level, thus reducing literary study in the English class to less than 50%. However, there is NO body of information that English teachers are responsible for teaching, unlike science teachers, for example, who are charged with teaching information about science. English teachers are trained—by college English departments and teacher preparation programs—to teach the four major genres of literature (poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction) and the elements of rhetoric, not a large body of fragmented information on a variety of contemporary or historical topics.

5. Common Core reduces opportunities for students to develop critical thinking. Critical, or analytical, thinking is developed in the English class when teachers teach students how to read between the lines of complex literary works. Analytical thinking is facilitated by the knowledge that students acquire in other ways and in other subjects because it cannot take place in an intellectual vacuum." As noted in a 2006 ACT report titled 'Reading Between the Lines:' 'complexity is laden with literary features.' According to ACT, it involves 'literary devices,' 'tone,' 'ambiguity,' 'elaborate' structure, 'intricate language,' and unclear intentions. Critical thinking applied to low-complexity texts, ACT concluded, is inferior to critical thinking applied to high-complexity texts. Thus, reducing literary study in the

English class in order to increase informational reading not only reduces the opportunity for students to learn how to do critical thinking but also, in effect, retards college readiness.

10:44:58 AM

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked when MS. Stotsky realized that the Validation Committee was not going in the right direction.

DR. STOTSKY answered that during the first month the committee's members were given a confidentiality agreement to sign. She explained that she had been on many civic committees and knows what Sunshine Laws are in addition to how the public needs to be informed. The committee was given a confidentiality agreement to sign that meant members could never talk about what happened in meetings during the course of committee's lifetime. She stated that she had never been on a committee where rights were signed away to talk about what the committee did. The committee was the "watch dog" committee and the requirement to sign the confidentiality agreement was the beginning of the process.

She informed the committee that members had no way of really influencing the Common Core Standards writers even though that was one of the Validation Committee's charges. She explained that the Validation Committee was charged to ensure, for example, that the CCSS were internationally benchmarked. She said she asked for her very first critique on what countries CCSS would be internationally benchmarked with and noted that she could never get the names of the countries. She said she and Professor Milgram could not sign-off on the CCSS because information that the Validation Committee was supposed to receive was not received. People who support CCSS continue to say that they are internationally benchmarked, but a person cannot find out what countries. There were a number of clues throughout about the Validation Committee "going south" and the CCSS document going even farther south.

10:47:58 AM

SENATOR DUNLEAVY addressed previous testimony on the waiver process and noted that there were two steps for a waiver process for NCLB; one was to accept CCSS outright and the other was to have universities validate the standards. He said that the University of Alaska validated the standards that the state adopted.

DR. STOTSKY answered that having universities sign-off on standards has happened in many states. She asked who actually

signed-off in Alaska, the president or the chancellor. She noted that the teaching faculties in many states have not signed-off and individuals who do not teach have signed-off. She asserted that higher level university administrators are not people who typically have read the math standards, in addition to not being a mathematician, scientist, or engineer, or an individual who can look at the math standards and understand whether the standards meet college-readiness. She said it is hard to answer Senator Dunleavy's question if the individual from the University of Alaska is not known.

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CHAIR STEVENS stated that the committee will find out who signed-off at the University of Alaska. He noted that Dr. Stotsky was talking about the Alaska Standards as compared to the CCSS and asked if the testing was the same. He remarked that he understood that Dr. Stotsky was not happy with the "secretism" of the process of developing the test.

DR. STOTSKY answered that Alaska would have been able to take the Smarter Balanced Test if the state formally adopted the CCSS. She noted that Alaska has similar tests to the CCSS. Alaska could adopt some tests developed by other testing companies, but they have all become aligned to CCSS. She the problem is no one knows where the cut-scores or test passages are going to be. She addressed the issue regarding not knowing what the reading levels will be. She said she is reviewing what Smarter Balanced and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) have been releasing regarding reading levels for grade 11. Smarter Balanced was closer to grade 9 or grade 10 in reading level and noted that subject matter dealt with informational issues that would not constitute a body of information that an English teacher would be teaching. She emphasized that English teachers teach reading skills. She asserted that she did not know why Alaska's institutions of higher education would think the Smarter Balanced test would be the kind of test the state would want for college readiness; but they need to be able to speak. She asked if the committee has heard from anybody from Alaska's institutions of higher education in engineering, math, science, English, or the humanities; those are the people the committee needs to hear from, not people from the Fordham Foundation or Washington D.C.

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CHAIR STEVENS replied that the committee has not reached that point yet, but the intent is to hear from the University of

Alaska within the next one to two weeks. He asked that Dr. Stotsky continue with her comments.

DR. STOTSKY responded that the committee needs to make sure that they are communicating with the people who are actually teaching faculty in the state's institutions of higher education. Teaching faculty members are the only ones who can tell the committee whether the state has a good set of standards that will determine admission. She continued with her prepared statement and noted that she left off when addressing literature standards and paraphrased from the prepared statement as follows:

6. Common Core's standards are not 'fewer, clearer, and deeper.' They may appear to be fewer in number than those in many states because very different objectives or activities are often bundled incoherently into one 'standard.' As a result, they are not clearer or necessarily deeper. It is frequently the case that these bundled statements posing as standards are not easy to interpret and many are poorly written. For example, a literature standard for grades 9/10 asks students to: 'determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.' This wretched sentence is a jumble of at least three different activities: determining a theme, analyzing its development, and summarizing a complete text. If Common Core's ELA standards are to be used, they must first be revised by experienced, well-trained high school English teachers for clarity and readability so that they can consistently guide curriculum development. Since Alaska's Department of Education claims it has not adopted Common Core's copyrighted documents, Alaska is free to revise these standards as it sees fit.

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7. The vocabulary standards are weak, often inappropriate, and more often poorly exemplified. These standards should be the strongest strand in Common Core's ELA standards because of the importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension. But they are not rigorous and often contain inappropriate pedagogical advice. For example, in grade 2, students

are to 'use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase' as the first of many strategies to determine the meaning of an unknown word. In grade 2, students should be first asked to sound out unfamiliar words to see if they recognize them as part of their own vocabulary since the 'meaning' of text-appropriate words should not be the problem in grade 2. Identification of a written word (a reading skill) is. Moreover, students need to be able to read the 'context' in order to use it as a clue.

As another example, in grade 2, students are also to 'use glossaries and beginning dictionaries to determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases.' However, they have not been taught the difference between these two types of references; one gives the technical meaning, the other the most frequent meaning (which may not be the technical meaning). This advice is a particular disservice to children who need strong vocabulary development.

As yet another example, in grade 2, students are to 'distinguish shades of meaning among closely related verbs (e.g., *toss, throw, hurl*) and closely related adjectives (e.g., *thin, slender, skinny, scrawny*).' Since many of these words are unlikely to be found in grade 2 texts, it is not clear what grade 2 teachers can do with this standard.

Summary:

(1) Common Core's ELA standards are NOT rigorous. They were designed to allow mid-level grade 11 students to enroll in credit-bearing courses in a non-selective college.

(2) Common Core's standards are NOT internationally benchmarked and will not make any of our students competitive.

(3) There is NO research to support Common Core's stress on writing instead of reading.

(4) There is NO research to support Common Core's stress on informational reading instead of literary study in the English class.

(5) There is no research to support the value of 'cold reading of historical documents, a bizarre pedagogy promoted by the chief architect of Common Core's ELA standards.

(6) Available research suggests exactly the opposite of what Common Core's document and standards promote in the ELA classroom.

10:57:48 AM

Suggestions to Alaska Legislators:

1. Return to, revise, and strengthen your own ELA standards. The adoption and implementation of Common Core's ELA standards (no matter what they are called) does not improve the academic education of Alaska's children, especially its neediest students, nor should Alaska base state assessments in reading on Common Core's English language arts standards. It would be a waste of taxpayers' money to base assessments on standards that need even more revision than its own standards did.

2. Develop a set of entrance exams (matriculation tests) for your own institutions of higher education, drawing on their engineering, science, and mathematics faculty and literary/humanities scholars. They could also ask these faculty members to collaborate with mathematics and science teachers in Alaska's high schools in designing syllabi for the advanced mathematics and science courses in Alaska's high schools. Why should federal education policy-makers or test developers mandate low admission requirements in mathematics, science, or English to Alaska's colleges and universities?

11:01:19 AM

3. Offer two different types of high school diplomas. Not all high school students want to go to college or can do the reading and writing required in authentic college coursework. Many have other talents and interests and should be provided with the opportunity to choose a meaningful four-year high school curriculum that is not college-oriented. One diploma, like the old New York Regents Diploma, would be for students willing to do advanced work in mathematics and science leading to a STEM career, or in English or the humanities. The other could be a Common Core Minimal Competency Diploma.

4. Review and revise if needed all standards at least every five to seven years using identified Alaska teachers, discipline-based experts in the arts and

sciences, and parents. All assessments should also be reviewed by Alaska teachers and discipline-based experts in the arts and sciences before the tests are given.

[11:02:19 AM](#)

5. Restructure and reform teacher and administrator training programs in Alaska's institutions of higher education to ensure that the teachers and administrators from these education schools have stronger academic credentials than they now have. Raising the floor for all children should be our primary educational goal, not closing demographic gaps among groups of children. The only thing we know from education research on teacher effectiveness is that effective teachers know the subject matter they teach. We need to raise the academic bar for every prospective teacher we admit to a teacher training program in an education school. That is the first step in raising student achievement in this country, not a set of paper standards.

(Note: Dr. Stotsky presented references in her prepared statement.)

[11:03:44 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Dr. Stotsky and noted that she made a good point regarding making sure teaching faculty is involved, not just administrators.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTIS addressed states making their own standards. She asked how many states have not chosen CCSS and have come up with their own standards.

DR. STOTSKY answered that there are four or five states that chose not to adopt CCSS. She noted Texas, Nebraska, and Virginia as three states that have not adopted CCSS. In 2010, most states had boards of education simply vote to adopt CCSS, in many cases before they were even written. She pointed out the issue with adopting standards without having expert advice.

[11:05:04 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked what her expectations were going to entail when she first signed on to be a part of the CCSS process.

DR. STOTSKY replied that she had a clear charge to the committee to ensure that the standards were internationally benchmarked, rigorous, and research based. Drafts were provided to review and critiques were submitted in kind to standards writers or to some "black box." She informed the committee that she never got a word back on her critiques. She explained that whatever she suggested was never done. She said she had spotted some of the same problems that are currently in Common Core's final version right at the beginning and she never could get to speak to the standards writers.

She explained that she was on a committee that was supposed to be overseeing the standards-writers and the Validation Committee was totally ignored. She said her experience was bizarre because she had never been on any kind of committee in her life like the Common Core's Validation Committee. She noted her experience in civic committees and the Common Core's Validation Committee was not a civic committee. The Common Core's Validation Committee was a committee appointed as a kind of "fig leaf" for a rubber stamp by two private organizations that were funded by the Gates Foundation to develop national standards. The Gates Foundation gave money to groups that would evaluate state standards and come up with a grade for the CCSS, but making sure the CCSS got a high enough grade so that it could then use the CCSS as a "boiler plate." The "boiler plate" effect did not occur with Alaska's Academic Standards. The "boiler plate" phrase was used for at least eight or so different states that said, "These standards are among the worst in the country and you are better off adopting Common Core."

She explained to the committee that a person could only imagine what happened in states with the media when the bottom-line evaluation quotation "worst in the country" was noted. She noted that state boards of education, including Massachusetts, had never read the CCSS that they adopted. No questions were asked about college-readiness or standards; it was given because states would be given \$250 million of "Race To The Top" money. Massachusetts was promised \$250 million in exchange for giving up such wonderful standards. She noted that the Massachusetts Governor was friends with President Obama and the state was promised \$250 million in "Race To The Top" money and the state received the money if prior standards were given up for the CCSS.

She said the CCSS process was all about politics and not about education. She asserted that CCSS is about centralized control of education in Washington, D.C. She declared that Alaska's

legislators have recognized the pattern of what she previously noted.

[11:08:36 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY addressed the Accuplacer Test, American College Testing (ACT), Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and other national assessments used to predict college readiness, success, or as a tool to measure where students are in terms of being able to succeed in college. He asked to confirm that all of the primary national assessments have been aligned to CCSS.

DR. STOTSKY answered correct. She explained that there are almost no independent points of reference other than Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). She explained that TIMSS is controlled by an international group of educators and is not aligned to CCSS. TIMSS is the only international test that can provide some sense of what is happening to high school students. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is only a test of skills and that is what the Department of Education is pushing for, because the assessment only tests 15-year-old students, and the level of math content is pitifully low. She specified that ACT, SAT, and the General Education Diploma (GED) have all been aligned down to CCSS, leaving almost no way to determine how "dumbed down" high school curriculum will be.

She noted that she is not talking about grades 1, 2, or 3; this is part of the problem that confuses a lot of people. She said CCSS has a lot of very impressive and tough sounding standards in the very early grades; but it peters out totally by high school.

She noted the lack of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) standards in high school. She asserted that states end up with a "dumbed down" set of high school mathematical standards with CCSS. English Language Arts (ELA) standards cannot be easily assessed until the passages and where the cut-score is in CCSS. There is no way of measuring direction unless there are before and after tests used in states to find out what is happening. She said she recommended "before and after" testing to a few states. She suggested that a state with its own test should be kept on file and readministered five years later to see if students are doing better, worse, or simply cannot even address it at all.

[11:11:48 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS addressed the Gates Foundation (GF) and noted that the legislature is pretty much removed from GF. He asked to clarify that Dr. Stotsky feels that GF is headed in the wrong direction.

DR. STOTSKY replied that GF is going in the wrong direction. She explained that GF has supported the development of the set of standards and gave money to: the National Governors Association (NGA), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) trade organizations, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Achieve, and the Fordham Institute. She said GF has given money wherever it could to promote the adoption of CCSS. One could still have an argument even if CCSS were first class standards. Only GF can answer why they are going in the direction that they chose. She said GF has more money than anybody else and has funded every organization, but they could not fund parents.

She explained that a rising opposition has been occurring with parents all over the country. She revealed that she has been speaking to a lot of parent groups. Parents are looking at what their kids are doing in class and they are getting very upset. Home-schoolers are particularly upset because they worry what is going to happen when it is time for their children to apply for college due to a CCSS aligned test that will have to be taken.

She noted that GF could not get state legislatures to buy-in because there are too many. State legislatures in the past year are being hit with bills for the CCSS testing and the technology that has to be purchased due to a certain level of bandwidth. Bills are coming due for state legislatures that were never anticipated.

She said when speaking to state legislatures the question is always addressed regarding what exactly is the Common Core. She explained that 45 or more state boards of education voted in 2010 to adopt a set of standards that nobody in higher education in any state had vetted. She revealed that she had gone state-by-state and verified that engineering, science, and math faculty were not invited to look at the standard prior to state adoption. She noted that Michigan did not reach out to its first-rate universities, faculty, and experts to review the standards.

[11:16:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GATTIS asked if there were any state legislatures that have paused, slowed down, or even undone the CCSS.

DR. STOTSKY answered that Indiana has paused and Georgia is trying to have review committees. She said no state has been able to undo the sticky mess that their boards of education put them in without a lot of thought. States are discovering that it is not easy to legally get out of a vote by a governor and a board of education. She asserted that state boards of education have restructured entire school systems for a set of standards that unqualified people had written.

[11:18:04 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Dr. Stotsky for her comments.

[11:19:45 AM](#)

DR. JAMES MILGRAM, Professor Emeritus, Department of Mathematics, Stanford University, Stanford, California, presented the committee with his prepared statement on "Some Problems with Mathematics Core Standards" as follows:

I am an internationally known research mathematician at Stanford University. As a research mathematician, I have a large number of honors. For example, I am one of the very small numbers of 20th century mathematicians whose collected works are slated for publication by a major publisher. I've also had many International honors such as the Gauss professorship in Germany, and even recently, I gave lecture series in Japan, China, and Canada on my recent work in Robotics and Bioinformatics. In 2009 I was appointed to the Common Core Validation Committee. I was the only actual mathematician and, indeed, the only member with a Ph.D. in a content area and not in education on Validation, so I took in on myself to try to get the best possible document in mathematics.

DR. MILGRAM noted that unlike Dr. Stotsky's experience, he was able to interact directly with the lead authors for the CCSS. He said he was able to considerably strengthen what had originally been planned by some of the sponsors. He said the Gates Foundation was not so involved in the math. Marc Tucker [National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE)] and Achieve were very much involved. He said he ended up doing some considerable discussion with groups to try to explain why the standards had to be tougher. He remarked that he was able to achieve a little bit of improvement over what the original plan was.

[11:21:41 AM](#)

DR. MILGRAM continued with his prepared statement as follows:

However, in the end, I could not sign off on a statement to the effect that CCMS was benchmarked at the level of the top international standards. Today, I'd like to describe my reasons, and to try to help you understand why I think adopting CC is a very bad idea.

The famous education historian, Diane Ravitch, noted in her book Left Back, that every 20 years or so, the education schools notice that our K-12 outcomes are not improving in math, in fact, they seem to be getting worse. They then say 'We can fix the problems.' And they present to us exactly the same programs and curricula that they presented 20 years earlier. They tell the small group that remembers 20 years back, that we had improperly implemented their programs then, so the failure was not the fault of the schools of education. This time we need to spend more money and everything will be fine.

He asserted that legislatures are finding out that the costs of the CCSS tests are astronomical. Legislatures routinely buy-in to the wishful thinking. He said he is reminded of Albert Einstein's famous definition of insanity, "Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." He continued with his prepared statement as follows:

So, welcome to California in 1993. We are hearing exactly the same rhetoric now as we heard then and we are being presented with the same curricula and programs as then. Indeed, the chief difference between then and now is that this time they are presenting them to the entire country. The terrible math textbooks that we got rid of in California with such difficulty are now back.

The foundation for this advance is the Common Core Math Standards (CCMS) a political document that was written in such a manner that it could be interpreted in many different ways. The point was to get buy-in from as many states and education establishments as possible.

[11:24:42 AM](#)

CCMS claims that its intent is to correct the problems with U.S. K-12 mathematics and, if followed faithfully, will make all high school graduates workforce and college-ready. It is said that CCMS will also strengthen the Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) pipeline, and rescue our economy by dramatically increasing the number of students majoring in STEM areas at university.

In order to do this it is claimed that CCMS will correct our 'Mile Wide and Inch Deep' K-12 math curriculum, making our instruction much more like the focused teaching in the high-achieving countries. There will be far fewer standards and they will focus on key topics, exactly as is done in the high achieving countries.

Indeed, grade by grade, CCMS does have fewer standards, but to do this they produce things like the following monstrosity, a first grade addition and subtraction standard:

Add within 100, including adding a two-digit number and a one-digit number, and adding a two-digit number and a multiple of 10, using concrete models or drawings and strategies based on place value, properties of operations, and/or the relationship between addition and subtraction; relate the strategy to a written method and explain the reasoning used. Understand that in adding two-digit numbers, one adds tens and tens, ones and ones; and sometimes it is necessary to compose a ten.

[11:27:02 AM](#)

This is a glom of separate standards. In the high achieving countries only a small amount of the material above is covered in first grade or even first and second grade together, and yet this material is the main focus of instruction most of these years. Moreover, some of the standard is probably absurd to ask of first or second graders. For example, relate the strategy to a written method and explain the reasoning used. Also, the number of choices given, using concrete models or drawing and strategies based on place value, properties of operations, and/or the

relationship between addition and subtraction is clearly overwhelming for students of this age.

11:28:58 AM

It seems that the reason for this omnibus glom was to include the many different approaches to addition and subtraction that are advocated in the interested states and associations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). As a result, CCMS has often preserved the "mile wide" structure of our standards, just using fewer, often incomprehensible, paragraphs to do it.

Another major issue is that the standards develop very slowly. Indeed, by the end of sixth grade CCMS is more than one year behind international expectations, and by the end of eighth grade, more than two years behind. For example, internationally, one expects fourth graders to be quite fluent with ratios, rates, and motion-at-constant-speed types of questions.

11:30:17 AM

I would grade the standards as follows: K-5 considerably above average for our states, not nearly as good as the best which are CA, MA, IN, MN, WA, but better than 90 percent; sixth to seventh grade is about average; eighth grade mostly just spinning wheels; and high school is a serious, serious, problem.

DR. MILGRAM noted that the mathematics issue is very similar to English Language Arts (ELA) in that things are okay for the first five years and really fall apart by high school. He continued his prepared statement as follows:

Indeed, in March, 2010 one of the two lead authors of CCMS, Jason Zimba, testified as follows, 'We have agreement to the extent that it's a fuzzy definition, that the minimally college-ready student is a student who passed Algebra II.'

DR. MILGRAM explained that the original intent in CCSS was to have Algebra I as the minimal standard for a college-ready student, one of the things that he succeeded in changing. He noted that the change involved an enormous fight in order to get a simple change from Algebra I to Algebra II. He continued with his prepared statement as follows:

But even Algebra II is an extraordinarily weak standard. Only about one in three students whose highest math course in high school was Algebra II will obtain a four year college degree in any subject and there is only a 1 in 50 chance that a STEM intending student with this background will ever get a four year degree in any STEM area. Of course, even Algebra II is a considerable improvement on the original draft where the definition of college-ready student is a student who passed Algebra I; U.S. government provided data shows that with this standard only 7 percent of students will ever obtain a 4 year college degree.

[11:33:00 AM](#)

Mr. Zimba clarified the Algebra II definition later in his testimony by stating that CCMS is not for STEM and he expanded on it by saying the following:

Not only not for STEM, it's also not for selective colleges. For example, for UC Berkeley, whether you are going to be an engineer or not, you'd better have pre-calculus to get into UC Berkeley.

Thus we are talking about preparing kids for 'success' at community colleges and perhaps non-selective colleges like University of Phoenix. In particular, it entirely abandons the top 30 percent of a typical high school class.

Here is the reason I say 30 percent. In California we have two university systems, the University of California (UC) system and the California State University system (UCS). The UC system guarantees admission to about the top 10 percent of the California high school graduating class, while the CSU system guarantees admission to about the top 30 percent. In the case of the UC system, currently a student who has not gone further than the CCMS expectations will not be eligible for admission, and in the CSU system, they may be eligible, but the expectation is that they would have to start with trigonometry and pre-calculus, which, as I've mentioned, severely curtails the likelihood that they will ever major in a STEM area, or, indeed, even graduate.

11:35:13 AM

We can assume that our education schools are well aware of all this. Consequently, it should be no surprise that a key requirement for states to apply for 'Race to the Top' money was to include signed agreements with the heads of all public colleges and universities or systems stating that students with the CCMS background, passing the SBAC or PARCC Algebra II exam in mathematics and a similar ELA requirement, would be eligible for credit bearing introductory math courses in any public college or university. This severely threatens the international dominance of our university system by forcing public colleges and universities to make most of their non-credit bearing remedial courses into courses that can be taken for credit, which has a dramatic effect on the expected subject knowledge of their math and ELA majors.

So I would judge that, in spite of the quality of CCSS in the early grades, the overall effect of these new standards is extremely risky not only for students, but, indeed, for our very economic wellbeing.

11:36:51 AM

SENATOR GARDNER stated that her understanding is CCSS is designed and required for all students. She said we all know some students want to, or will be able to pursue, STEM careers, particularly at selective universities. She said she is not certain that it is fair to require, as part of graduation, that students take the rigorous mathematics courses. She asked if she misunderstood Dr. Milgram's presentation regarding the necessity for all students to take more advanced math courses.

DR. MILGRAM replied yes. He explained that the CCSS becomes a ceiling because schools basically have to teach to the tests. He noted the negative impact on ambitious students. Data will show that wealthy districts test high and low income districts are negatively impacted when there is no expectation that more advanced courses should be available.

11:40:15 AM

SENATOR GARDNER remarked that she has a different opinion. She said students in Alaska have the option to take math classes far beyond the three years required for a high school diploma in the major and urban schools.

DR. MILGRAM revealed that his grandson attends school in Anchorage and he is well aware of what occurs in the Anchorage School District.

[11:41:08 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked to verify that the university system officials in California have signed off on the CCSS process.

DR. MILGRAM answered yes. He detailed that California applied for, but did not receive, "Race to the Top" money. In order to apply it was necessary for California's high officials to sign a letter agreeing to give the students a college credit course for passing either the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) or Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) exams.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY assumed that California will continue to have international students apply to Stanford. He asked if the university's benchmarks, standards, or assessments change to determine readiness for international students.

[11:42:41 AM](#)

DR. MILGRAM noted that Stanford University is not a public university. He explained that Stanford University has anticipated the issue Senator Dunleavy mentioned by redefining itself as the dominant core-university for countries that border the Pacific Ocean. He remarked that it is becoming more difficult for Stanford University to find U.S. citizens for admission and the entry number keeps going down. Stanford University's structure of their undergraduate system has appeared to change. He asserted that Stanford University has not changed their expectations in the terms of its courses.

[11:44:14 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked what admission benchmarks Stanford University uses for non-CCSS students from foreign countries.

DR. MILGRAM replied that Stanford University informally requires calculus as remedial. He explained that it is very difficult for a student to be admitted into Stanford University without taking a high school calculus course. Other elite universities in the U.S. have the same approach as Stanford's requirements. He asserted that CCSS will limit the number of students taking calculus in high school. Approximately 19 percent of U.S. high school students take calculus, whereas 90 percent take calculus in the high achieving countries. Fewer U.S. citizens will end up

at the elite schools. He remarked that none of the elite schools are going to lower their standards.

[11:45:49 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH said the committee is hearing two starkly opposing views of CCSS. He asked to confirm that Dr. Milgram believes the CCSS are too weak.

DR. MILGRAM answered yes. He qualified that standards do not have a huge effect on curriculum; but they do have a real effect on expectations. He clarified that CCSS is better than the old standards. However, the reality is CCSS is not near good enough for the U.S. to remain competitive internationally. The U.S. will pay the cost of lower standards. He said to not expect CCSS to be a solution to the country's real problems.

SENATOR FRENCH noted prior testimony from Dr. Stotsky on her belief regarding the influence of Gates Foundation money on producing some of the decisions. He pointed out that Dr. Stotsky specified that she was not getting paid by anybody to appear to testify on CCSS. He asked if Dr. Milgram is getting money from either side of the debate.

DR. MILGRAM answered no. He specified that he only asks that his travel expenses be compensated for when providing testimony in person.

[11:48:32 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Dr. Milgram for his comments and asked the committee for their input.

MR. MINNICH reviewed the testimony from Dr. Stotsky. He remarked that Dr. Stotsky was not truthful in certain situations and the committee hit on the fact that Dr. Milgram believes everybody should be taking calculus. He said Alaska would really face a different challenge from its constituency if the state requires all students to take calculus.

He said he would correct some of the information said in previous testimony. The CCSS Validation Committee was 28 members, 24 members signed off; Dr. Stotsky and Dr. Milgram obviously did not sign off. He noted that the 24 members not being mathematicians was not accurate.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTIS asked for confirmation that 24 out of 28 Validation Committee members did sign off. She inquired about the two other individuals that did not sign off.

MR. MINNICH replied that the two other members felt like they did not have enough information to make their decision. He noted that Ms. Stotsky said that there was a lack of focus on literature. He read the introduction to the CCSS as follows:

Because the ELA classroom must focus on literature, stories, drama, and poetry, as well as literary nonfiction, a great deal of informational reading in grades 6 through 10 must take place in other classes if the [National Assessment of Educational Progress] (NAEP) assessment framework is to be matched instructionally.

He continued that the CCSS do call for much of ELA instruction to take place in other classes and a continued focus on literature.

He pointed out that the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is partially funding by the Gates Foundation (GF). He noted that a lot of organizations are funded by GF and he is happy to provide additional information if the committee so desired. He summarized that the bottom line is that states decided to do CCSS well before funding was provided. He explained that CCSSO sought funding to try to save states money. The first proposal on the CCSS was to actually have states pay-in and work on developing the standards with states' money. He pointed out that commissioners at the time did not feel like they would be able to get an appropriation to be involved with CCSS as initially proposed. CCSSO raised money to write CCSS.

He addressed a claim on Michigan and their standards. He said one of the members on the Validation Committee was Bill Schmidt, a mathematics professor from Michigan State University and an individual who signed-off on CCSS.

[11:52:07 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH noted Dr. Milgram twice iterated that the CCSS were not benchmarked at the top of international standards. He asked if Mr. Minnich agreed or disagreed.

MR. MINNICH replied that he disagreed. He said Dr. Milgram is suggesting that many more people are taking calculus in other countries. He stated he cannot validate Dr. Milgram's claim that 90 percent of kids in other countries take calculus. He set forth that an interesting conversation would occur if the states were to go to a standard where 90 percent of kids take calculus.

He asserted that the current mathematics level in the U.S. would not allow for an immediate jump to 90 percent of kids taking calculus. He summarized that the CCSS was benchmarked against other countries; Finland, Singapore, and a long list of other countries.

[11:53:21 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked Dr. Milgram and Dr. Stotsky to respond.

DR. MILGRAM replied that the number of people who graduate from high school in the high achieving countries is over 90 percent and most do not allow high school degrees without calculus. It is not realistic to say this country's kids cannot get to calculus because they can with proper instruction. He asserted that students are not being properly instructed and changes will not occur under CCSS. The cost of CCSS, especially in the near-term future, is going to be dramatic. The U.S. cannot compete long term with the other countries and related the challenge to China's rapid growth in space exploration. He said the U.S. has to realize the potential impact from the education the country's children receive.

[11:56:18 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS noted that Mr. Minnich agreed.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked to clarify that Alaska's current standards are better than the old standards.

DR. MILGRAM answered yes. He specified that Alaska's current standards were virtually identical to the CCSS. He detailed that 90 percent of the states' standards for lower grades are better than the standards the states had. He said where Core Standards fall apart is in the higher grades.

DR. STOTSKY addressed Mr. Minnich's response to her presentation. She said the information she provided was accurate. She specified that her emphasis pertains to what is in the CCSS. She said Mr. Minnich's rebuttal refers to the CCSS's introductory text and not the standards.

[11:58:33 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the committee will stand at-ease.

[1:01:21 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting.

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, introduced himself and described it as good news that Alaska adopted the Alaska Academic Standards rather than the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English/Language Arts and Mathematics. He explained that nine university professors were on the committee that developed the standards, a different team did the vetting, and the process did not require any confidentiality agreements.

[1:03:51 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the presentation today would look at how the English/language arts and math standards were developed, and the difference among states on how the standards are adopted. In Alaska, the starting point was the state education policy that is in statute. It is a powerful statement about the responsibilities for education in Alaska to ensure that all students will succeed in their education and work and lead satisfying lives. He noted that the DEED website refers to this as [Preparing College, Career and Culturally Ready Graduates.]

SENATOR DUNLEAVY said it appeared in testimony this morning that there were two methods for the waiver. One was to adopt the CCSS and the other was to get the university to validate the Alaska Academic Standards. He asked for confirmation that Alaska chose the second method.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY agreed that Alaska did not adopt the CCSS.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY commented that it sounds like the mission statement is changing.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied the mission statement isn't changing, but there is recognition that too many students need remediation. Both employers and the university have said that students were not being adequately prepared for further education, further training, or work. The idea is to bridge the gap and prepare students for the next step.

[1:07:06 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY pointed out that university validation ensures that kids are educated to be college ready, but all kids don't want to go to college. He questioned how it was possible to merge the systems without changing the mission.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied that the mission isn't changing; it's being clarified and shifting from graduation to

preparation. He added that validation is something the university system did.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY responded that if the university system is the only one that did validation then students are being prepared for university.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY clarified that the university validated the standards in regard to the waiver, and employers were involved with the development of the standards. A student who is proficient in these standards will match the expectations for entry-level courses. That was the validation process.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the mission does what is going to be done or if the statement needed to be revisited.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said he believes the mission works.

[1:09:12 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY continued the presentation explaining that Alaska statute states that the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development are to "develop performance standards in reading, writing and mathematics to be met at designated age levels by each student in public schools in the state." It further states that the department "shall develop a comprehensive system of student assessments, composed of multiple indicators of proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics."

He highlighted that in Moore v. State, Judge [Sharon] Gleason identified and defined the clause to establish and maintain a system of public education in Alaska as meaning four things. Development of standards and assessments were two key components of the responsibilities as a state; funding, oversight and support were the others.

[1:10:12 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that the corresponding regulation speaks to the general definition of standards and curriculum. [4 AAC 04.010(c)] says, "The content standards identify student abilities that evidence mastery of a subject area. The content standards are not graduation requirements of curriculum, but they establish what constitutes excellent educational results and allow a school district to tailor its curriculum to the conditions, goals, and expectations of its community."

CHAIR STEVENS asked if Alaska would be free to use national exams based on CCSS since the Alaska Academic Standards are substantially similar.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY offered his belief that the state would have the option of maintaining control of the standards while also accessing an assessment around the CCSS. He said that's why in April Alaska joined the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium as an advisory state. It is a better match than the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) which is being developed for the CCSS. He noted that DEED just finished a request for proposal (RFP) to provide or develop an assessment. The components of that assessment will be addressed in tomorrow's presentation, he said.

CHAIR STEVENS asked what the state is giving up and what it is getting by going from common core to the Alaska Academic Standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied that he didn't believe the state was giving up anything, but it could be argued that it would give up access to curriculum that's aligned to the CCSS. What's gained is local vetting by educators of the higher education system, ownership, and no outside influence as to what can and cannot go into the standards and what students are expected to learn. He opined that the Alaska Academic Standards are aligned with the standards and expectations of other states.

[1:14:30 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if this was a national movement and not a federal imposition.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied that CCSS is a relatively new movement.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if a member of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) who was in the audience would agree that it's a national movement.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY stated that the Alaska standards are not a national movement.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY observed that a timing issue was causing confusion, because Alaska got involved with the national movement associated with CCSS as it was sweeping the country.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY agreed that the state capitalized on the national movement.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if he agreed that there was a relationship with the waiver under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

COMMISSIONER HANLEY agreed there was a distant relationship.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the state would still be under the NCLB paradigm if it hadn't applied for the waiver.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said yes.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the state could have gotten the waiver if the university had validated the old standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said no, because the old standards were not rigorous enough to be considered college and career ready.

[1:17:24 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the university system had to validate standards that were common core-like in order to be accepted.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied that there were several components to get a waiver, one of which was to have college and career-ready standards. Secretary of Education Duncan recognized that the CCSS represented college and career-ready standards. A state that didn't have those common core standards had to prove that its standards were college and career-ready and that's done by having the university system vet the standards.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if he agreed that federal money was tied to the NCLB Act.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered no.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY pointed out that the Race to the Top Fund is federal.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that the first round specifically spoke to common standards.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY commented that the national movement, the university looking at standards and the NCLB waiver appear to be a series of interesting coincidences.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that those were totally separate processes. The Alaska Academic Standards were being developed long before Secretary Duncan thought about a waiver from NCLB.

1:20:59 PM

CHAIR STEVENS related that he had received calls from people who described the state standards as common core by a different name. He asked if there were substantial differences between the Alaska Academic Standards and the CCSS.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said yes, and Dr. McCauley would speak to the similarities and differences. He added that when the state joined the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) it said the Alaska Academic Standards were substantially similar and that the assessment would adequately measure Alaska students.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked what penalty Kathleen Porter-Magee was referring to when she talked about opting out without penalty.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY explained that her point was that there is no penalty for adopting or not adopting.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Commissioner Hanley to continue the presentation.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY displayed the "Alaska English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards" notebook, which is organized by grade level. He explained that the standards were developed by DEED and adopted by the State Board of Education in its entirety. Everything that was adopted is in the notebook and it includes nothing that was not adopted. He deferred to Dr. McCauley for further discussion.

1:24:55 PM

SUSAN MCCAULEY, PhD., Director, Teaching & Learning Support, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, said she wanted to review a few of the Alaska Academic Standards, but she was also prepared to discuss what the standards are, what they're not, how they compare to the CCSS, and how they compare to the previous standards. She directed attention to the English/Language Arts Standards for kindergarten as an example. The kindergarten standards include reading standards for literature, reading standards for informational text, reading standards for foundational skills, writing standards, speaking and listening standards, and language standards.

DR. MCCAULEY noted that there had been a lot of interchangeable use of the terms "standard" and "curriculum," and emphasized that they are very different. Standards are guidelines that describe the skills students are to master at each grade level and curriculum describes methodology and means by which the standards will be met. Curriculum includes everything from the textbooks to the lesson plans that teachers will develop to meet the standards. In Alaska, the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) is charged with adopting standards, whereas curriculum is a local decision.

DR. MCCAULEY reviewed the reading standards for kindergarten and third grade emphasizing that the standards do not talk about how a child will attain the standard. They are a roadmap for building incrementally, grade-by-grade so that there are no gaps or redundancies in the instruction. They provide consistency with regard to what is taught at each grade level. There is nothing in the standards that tell how the instruction takes place.

1:28:25 PM

SENATOR HUGGINS asked what happens when a student does not meet the standard for his or her grade level.

DR. MCCAULEY said it is first very important to ensure that the standards are clear, concise and coherent enough that teachers understand precisely what should be taught at each grade level. She opined that the new Alaska Academic Standards provide that clarity. She said that states have taken different approaches, but school districts in Alaska are looking at what intervention structures are needed when students aren't mastering grade-level standards. This can't be ignored because the problem compounds. A student who hasn't mastered third grade math and doesn't receive additional support is unlikely to master the on grade level skills in subsequent grades.

DR. MCCAULEY suggested that individual school districts could talk about the assessment and support measures they have developed to help students who aren't working at grade level, and reiterated the importance of having clarity in the on grade level standards to begin with. What standards do is to concretely clarify what skills, if mastered at each grade level, will result in the student being prepared for what comes next.

SENATOR HUGGINS suggested that if 10 teachers read the standards for any grade level there would be a great variance in the interpretation of those standards.

DR. MCCAULEY said districts take a varied approach, but they are all required by regulation to review curriculum on a cycle. They work at the local level to bring clarity to the standard.

[1:34:55 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS highlighted the importance of being able to read at grade level in the third grade.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if a child is passed on, failed, or sent for remediation if they don't meet the standard for reading in third grade.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied that there is no statute or regulation that determines that; it's done at the local level.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked, theoretically, what happens if none of the students meet the standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that one of DEED's constitutional responsibilities is support and oversight. In that regard, DEED does a lot of curriculum alignment and work with districts to answer the question at the local level of what to do when students aren't proficient.

[1:37:20 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if more intervention training and curriculum alignment is being done than in the past.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said yes; over the last year he's heard more thanks from districts for helping and that more would be appreciated. He acknowledged that compliance is part of the leadership role, but support is what DEED is defining as the key role with regard to standards.

[1:38:24 PM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY highlighted the differences between the Alaska Academic Standards and the Common Core State Standards. In the area of English/language arts, the Alaska Academic Standards have a total of 320 individual standards, and 133 or 42 percent of those standards are different than the CCSS. However, the content is substantially similar. For example, in fourth grade Alaska students are required to write a multi-paragraph essay, and CCSS has the same requirement. Alaska changed its standard to meet what is expected nationally.

She discussed the process that educators, post-secondary teachers and representatives from business and industry went through to develop the standards, and that they felt that Alaska needed modifications in the case of 42 percent of the standards that are in the CCSS. None were insignificant or token modifications. She provided examples, including the addition of culturally relevant reading materials.

DR. MCCAULEY said that the CCSS has 229 standards for math and the committee decided to modify 49 percent of those and add 26 more. The additions included things like solving real world problems involving elapsed times between time zones.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if modifying nearly 50 percent of the math standards might be a disadvantage when Alaska students take the common core tests that are given nationally.

DR. MCCAULEY said she didn't believe so, because the standards are substantially similar. She explained that the Alaska Academic Standards were developed because DEED wanted autonomy and control over the standards, and to ensure that Alaska students will be prepared and competitive.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the Alaska Academic Standards are more rigorous or just different.

DR. MCCAULEY replied they're different and equally rigorous.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if there would be any discussion later about the process for adoption of standards, the federal nationalized approach, and joining the assessment consortium in an advisory role. [He indicated that he received an affirmative response.]

[1:45:17 PM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY summarized that Alaska did not adopt the CCSS, and those standards are not identical to the Alaska Academic Standards.

CHAIR STEVENS remarked that that was helpful.

DR. MCCAULEY compared the Alaska Academic Standards to the previous standards. She explained that when the development committee considered objectively the rigor of the previous standards compared to what was happening nationally, they found a significant gap. As previously mentioned, an independent analysis of the previous standards corroborated what the

development committee found. It was clear that Alaska needed to significantly upgrade its standards. The old standards were more than six years old, had no speaking and listening skills in English/language arts, and only went to tenth grade. The upgrade attempts to be comparatively rigorous while maintaining autonomy to develop standards that are specific to Alaska students.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if she would agree that the standards changed and so did the goals and purpose. Previously, the approach was an exit concept, and now it's an entry concept for university.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said he described it as a change from graduation to preparation.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY reiterated his belief that the mission was changing, but the mission statement hadn't changed.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that the changes were in response to some very compelling Alaska data that would be irresponsible to ignore. It demands a response when 50 percent of incoming freshmen at the University of Alaska have to take remedial classes and 22 percent of Alaska jobs are exported to non-Alaskans. This isn't solely about college preparation; it's about preparation for any post-secondary training, she stated.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY remarked that it was only the university that was part of the validation process.

DR. MCCAULEY clarified that it was not just the university that was involved in the development of the standards, and that the term validation was about whether or not students who met the standards would need remedial course work.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY reiterated that teachers want to know what the mission is; previously it was to prepare students to exit [high school] and now it's preparing them to enter [post-secondary school]. He opined that there would be more conversations about this, because the purpose has changed for K-12 education.

[1:51:27 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked if the standards would be upgraded on a regular basis.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied that school districts are being asked to review their curriculum every six years and it's appropriate that the standards are reviewed in a similar

timeframe. Future adjustments to the standards are unlikely to be as extensive as this, he said.

DR. MCCAULEY summarized her talking points about the new standards. They intend to effectively prepare kids for what comes after graduation, and they address the gaps that existed between high school preparation and what comes next. The standards development process involved 8 meetings of 230 Alaska representatives from 56 organizations, including teachers of mathematics, language arts, special education, English language learners, post-secondary educators, and industry representatives.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY added that it is DEED's responsibility to help develop standards and to work with the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development in the adoption of those standards. He briefly summarized the subsequent presentations.

[1:55:16 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development adopted the standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY confirmed that it is the responsibility of the state board of education to do the official adoption and to put them in regulation.

SENATOR HUGGINS commented that the development of standards is the easy part; the vigor of the execution is the difficult part. He asked to have a conversation later about three structural things she'd like to do, based on the new standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY expressed appreciation for the insight, and noted that the district had been working on the standards since 2012.

DR. MCCAULEY agreed that the focus should be on how to effectively implement the standards and help students meet them.

SENATOR HUGGINS commented on the high percentage of students taking remedial classes and the low percentage of students who actually graduate from university, and stressed the importance of figuring out what the difficulty is, regardless of the standard.

[1:59:41 PM](#)

At ease from 1:59 pm to 2:06 pm.

[2:06:41 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting and introduced Mr. Merriner.

[2:07:01 PM](#)

JIM MERRINER, Chair, Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development (State Board), Juneau, Alaska, presented "Mission Statement & Adoption Efforts of Alaska's Academic Standards."

MR. MERRINER said the State Board's mission was adopted in 2003. It is "To ensure quality standards-based instruction to improve academic standards for all students." Adopting educational standards, which is what will be taught and learned, is central to the State Board's mission. Board members and DEED take it seriously.

He explained that Alaska first adopted standards in 1994-1995 for grades 3 through 10. It made a significant revision in 1998-1999, minor revisions in 2004, and in June 2012 the State Board adopted new and more rigorous standards for grades K-12.

MR. MERRINER provided an overview of the presentation. He said he would discuss the State Board's engagement in the standards revision process, the discussion leading to the decision to submit the standards for public review and comment in December 2011, the public comment period, legislative communication regarding the standards, and approval by the State Board in June 2012.

[2:09:40 PM](#)

MR. MERRINER related that the topic of revising Alaska's 3rd-10th grade standards was first discussed in November 2008 at a statewide education summit that was attended by 400 stakeholders from across the state. A consensus among the summit participants was that world-class schools have strong academic standards and high expectations for all students. The summit action plan called for a review of the 3rd-10th grade standards to determine alignment with world-class 21st century skills, and Alaska's graduation outcomes for student's post-secondary opportunities of their choosing.

He said that following up on the summit's action plan, the State Board and DEED initiated a standards review process. During 11 board meetings over the course of three years, the State Board was regularly briefed on, and engaged in, discussion about the standards development work in Alaska and nationwide.

MR. MERRINER highlighted some of the relevant board meeting discussions. In June 2009, then-Commissioner LeDoux discussed the nationwide movement to develop common standards, and that states are ultimately in control of standards. Alaska was asked but did not join the process of developing common standards, but the state did stay engaged in the process. In March 2010, DEED briefed the State Board regarding the results of the alignment study that compared Alaska's 3rd-10th grade standards with the CCSS. In December 2010, the State Board discussed with the university president how new Alaska standards could help to better align the K-12 and post-secondary arenas. Commissioner LeDoux indicated that the University of Alaska already had a seat at the table during the standards development process.

In June 2011, Alaska's K-12 assessment director reviewed with the State Board the standards development process to date, and Representative Dick testified about engaging industry in the standards development work. In September 2011, Commissioner Hanley told the State Board that the draft K-12 standards would be brought to the board meeting in December, and that they would meet the high benchmarks of national and global competitiveness.

MR. MERRINER said that in December 2011, the State Board submitted the draft K-12 standards for extended public review and comment. Before doing so, the State Board sought information from DEED on public engagement efforts during the department-led standards development process. They learned that eight meetings were held to develop the standards and invitees and participants included mathematics and language arts teachers, special education teachers, English language learner students, post-secondary educators, and industry representatives. The eight full-day meetings ultimately included 230 Alaska representatives from 56 different organizations.

[2:14:16 PM](#)

MR. MERRINER explained the process for putting a regulation out for public comment. It is sent to all school districts, superintendents, school principals, education organizations, legislators, and public and school libraries. The regulations are also published in the Anchorage Daily News, online and in DEED's newsletter. During the extended public comment period, DEED held five open public community meetings, eight webinars, and 17 in-person presentations statewide. Additionally, 18 requests for public comment were sent out through DEED's weekly newsletter, and 125 Alaskan organizations were asked to review and provide feedback.

In January 2012, the draft standards were discussed in the State Board's annual report to the legislature. During the legislative session, each State Board member met with at least one member of the legislature regarding the draft K-12 standards.

MR. MERRINER stated that in January 2013 he reported on the adoption of the K-12 standards in the State Board's annual report to the legislature.

[2:16:17 PM](#)

MR. MERRINER reported that during the five month public comment period, the State Board received 66 pages of public comment from 33 individuals and groups. Every comment was read and reviewed by each State Board member. Many of the comments expressed thanks for including all the stakeholders in the development of the standards. Some commenters urged adoption of the CCSS rather than separate Alaska standards. A few of the comments specifically asked for literacy standards for history, science and technical subjects in secondary grades, and a few supported the distinction between narrative and informational text. Some of the public comment supported adoption of the draft standards on the condition that the state also invests in an assessment system that is aligned to the standards that is comparable to peers nationwide. Concern was raised that the standards may be written for college bound students only, and about the developmental appropriateness of some of the proposed kindergarten math standards. There was mention that the draft standards were too wordy and some comments voiced appreciation that speaking and listening standards were included. Concern was mentioned about the increased rigor of the draft standards, particularly for math. Comment was received about the need for professional development in the implementation of the new standards.

MR. MERRINER said that all public comments that made educational sense for Alaska students were incorporated into the final version that went before the State Board for discussion and consideration in June 2012. For example, literacy standards in history, science, and technical subjects were added for grades 6-12, and a table emphasizing math computational skills expected by the standards at each grade level was added. In June 2012 the State Board adopted the new standards.

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MR. MERRINER said that during the final discussion, Esther Cox, the State Board chair during the standards development process, reminded the members that "This conversation will never be over

because we need to constantly review our standards." He concluded by reiterating that adopting educational standards is central to the State Board's mission and the members taking it seriously. He reminded the committee that the State Board begins each meeting with public comment, and anyone who has comments or suggestions regarding the new Alaska standards should feel free to bring them to the board. He offered to answer questions.

CHAIR STEVENS recognized Ms. Cox and thanked her and all the board members for their service.

He asked Mr. Merriner if he was comfortable that the new standards refer to vocational, career, and life studies in addition to college bound students.

MR. MERRINER said he was and related his impression of one of the day-long meetings he attended looking at the math standards.

[2:21:19 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Mr. Merriner and introduced Dr. Thomas.

DANA THOMAS, PhD., Vice President, Academic Affairs, University of Alaska Statewide System, Fairbanks, Alaska, stated that he is a product of the Alaska public school system and a 33-year faculty member at the university, six of which were as chair of mathematics at UAF. He provided an overview of the topic areas he was asked to address: UA view of the standards, engagement in development of the standards, vetting the standards, expected impact of the new standards.

DR. THOMAS confirmed that the University of Alaska validated and submitted a formal letter of support for the new standards to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan as part of Alaska's application for a waiver from elements of the No Child Left Behind Act. One of the questions that arose during that conversation was whether UA would have done that under the old standards. He said his answer would be "No," because the rate of need for developmental education of high school graduates from Alaska coming to the university makes it clear that the old standards aren't preparing high school graduates to be college ready.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if he would address the group that looked at the new standards.

DR. THOMAS explained that they were discussed with the chief academic officers of the three institutions, and as the chief

academic officer for the UA system, he gave the advice to the president.

CHAIR STEVENS asked for confirmation that faculty were involved in the process.

DR. THOMAS replied that many faculty members were involved later in the development and vetting process; the decision to write the letter was an administrative decision.

He reviewed some of the ways that UA demonstrates support for the new Alaska Academic Standards. These include: educating teacher candidates to use the new standards in designing and assessing instruction; providing in-service opportunities for teachers both by distance and in person; aligning the new standards with UA's current work on revising baccalaureate general education requirements; [documenting alignment of the standards, instruction and assessment for Alaska's Learning Network courses; and Alaska standards are used in the implementation of a dual credit course for K-12 students participating in Future Education of Alaska].

DR. THOMAS highlighted that another demonstration of support is that the university has a member on the Smarter Balanced Assessment team in order to decide whether that is a good college-ready assessment.

2:26:06 PM

DR. THOMAS compared the old and new standards, primarily mathematics. He said that it's of great concern that the vast majority of the need for developmental education for students coming to UA is in the area of mathematics. The new standards are much more advanced and more specific than the old standards. As previously mentioned, the old standards only went through the 10th grade, which didn't reflect college ready. The new Alaska Academic Standards include a greater emphasis on functions, trigonometry, data analysis and probability, which makes it more likely that high school graduates will complete a college level degree. Emphasis is placed on developing an ability to apply mathematics to novel situations and to identify and explain logical and/or flawed reasoning. The new standards extensively discuss the use of matrices and what a student needs to be able to do with them, whereas the old standards had just one statement about matrices. The positive aspect for the university is that things like multiplying matrices won't have to be taught in introductory statistics if high school graduates have achieved the skill.

He said the new standards have much more detail and content on conditional probability, random variables and distributions, and the use of probability in decision making. This helps prepare students for the real world, far beyond just college ready.

[2:29:12 PM](#)

DR. THOMAS discussed how the new standards are helping prepare students to be career ready, not just college ready. He explained that certain labor union certifications require a significant background in trigonometry, and that a lot of laborers currently can't achieve the certification because the old standards didn't have that. The situation is the same for plumbers and pipefitters. He relayed that his son recently became a journeyman after completing a five-year apprenticeship program that started with a cohort of 30 and finished with a cohort of 14. The most common reason for dropping out was that the apprentice could not do the math, particularly trigonometry. The new standards are helping to better prepare students for career or college.

The old standards were very generic on reading and writing, whereas the new standards provide more specifics. For example, there are now specific standards for reading and writing and science and technology, and reading and writing and history and social studies. There are new standards on speaking and listening skills, and adapting your speech to your audience. Many of those elements did not exist in the old standards. Furthermore, there have been significant upgrades in the use of technology.

DR. THOMAS discussed how the University of Alaska engaged in the development of the new Alaska Academic Standards. He said that 19 different faculty took part in the College & Career Ready Standards Revision meetings over the two-year process. Faculty from the three large and rural campuses in the fields of mathematics, English composition and reading, education, chemistry, and early childhood development participated in the meetings.

UAA's Center for Alaska Education Policy Research partnered with the Oregon Educational Policy Improvement Center to conduct a survey of faculty who teach entry-level courses in UA's four-year and two-year postsecondary programs.

DR. THOMAS related that as part of the vetting process, the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) distributed

the draft standards on January 4, 2012. On February 17, 2012 all department chairs and deans at UAF were asked to provide feedback. He noted that the provosts at both UAS and UAA recall sending similar solicitations, but they were unable to provide documentation of having done so.

He addressed the question of whether the new Alaska Standards address the need for developmental education and the K-12 to UA gap. He recapped that roughly 52 percent of recent Alaska high school graduates attending the UA system need some developmental coursework, and that UA is working in close partnership with DEED to reduce that number. He described this as a true partnership because UA educates teachers, helps mentor teachers, and helps place teachers through the Alaska Teacher Placement Program. He expressed gratitude for the significant help the legislature has provided through the implementation of Alaska Performance Scholars (APS) and the Alaska Advantage Program. He highlighted that only 20 percent of APS students entering UA in fall 2013 needed developmental education. He suggested the legislature might also consider incentivizing calculus in the APS curriculum. He described this as a small change that might help the national agenda.

[2:34:12 PM](#)

DR. THOMAS stated that UA expects to see significant improvement in reducing the need for developmental coursework for Alaska high school graduates, based on the new Alaska Standards and the relatively new Alaska Performance Scholarship program.

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CHAIR STEVENS asked for more information on the developmental courses, such as who teaches the classes and what it costs the student.

DR. THOMAS replied that the student pays the same amount as any entry level course and that the qualifications to teach a developmental class require just a master's degree. He further explained that they are four credit classes with regard to qualifying for financial aid, and non-credit classes with regard to meeting baccalaureate requirements.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if developmental classes would generally be offered through a community college program in states that have a community college system.

DR. THOMAS said yes, whereas the University of Alaska has a combined community college and university mission so it carries both responsibilities.

CHAIR STEVENS cited the significant difference in cost between community college and university courses in the state of California, and suggested that Alaska might find a less expensive way to deliver developmental classes.

DR. THOMAS recounted that UA is working to better prepare new teachers and high school graduates, and is partnering with DEED through the Alaska Learning Network to ensure that the correct level of classes are offered statewide.

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DR. THOMAS reiterated that because the new Alaska Standards won't be fully implemented until 2015/16, it's too early to tell what their impact will be. However, there is reason for optimism and UA is actively engaging new teacher candidates to learn and implement the new standards in the classroom.

DR. THOMAS concluded his comments with a summary of the five changes he advocated for this past summer.

- 1) Examine an Alaska Performance Scholarship curriculum for all students unless a parent opts the student out;
- 2) Improve math outcomes by improving requirements for new teacher hires, changing teaching methods and standards, and embedding it in other content areas;
- 3) Implement college-ready assessment no later than 11th grade, and having the university engaged in the Smarter Balanced Assessment group;
- 4) Further facilitate K-12 in the University of Alaska dual enrollment; and
- 5) Improve teacher retention, particularly in rural Alaska, by expanding or improving the teacher mentoring process.

[2:39:56 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if he agrees with Dr. Milgram that new math standards are not rigorous enough, and that students should be more rigorously prepared for STEM fields and selective universities.

DR. THOMAS replied the new standards are a significant and positive step forward. He said that national research shows that a student who takes a math class after algebra II is much more likely to complete a baccalaureate degree than those who do not. As a mathematician, he'd like to see a higher proportion of high

school graduates who have already taken calculus, but Alaska isn't ready to demand that of all high school graduates. He reiterated that building incentives in the Alaska Performance Scholarship would be a good way to help achieve some of that national agenda.

[2:41:51 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked how much it costs a UAF student to take a remedial education class.

DR. THOMAS replied it's about \$450 for a three credit class.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if he would be working with DEED to develop K-12 assessments, possibly utilizing the UA developmental curriculum.

DR. THOMAS answered that UA is very happy to partner with DEED to ensure that students are appropriately prepared to take collegiate-level courses. The Alaska Learning Network provides that opportunity.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Dr. Thomas and introduced Diane Hirshberg.

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DIANE HIRSHBERG, PhD., Director, UAA Center for Alaska Education Policy Research (CAEPR), Anchorage, Alaska, provided a summary of the 2012 Alaska Content Standards Validity Study.

DR. HIRSHBERG explained that when CAEPR was hired to work on the validity study, they subcontracted part of it to the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) from the University of Oregon. That research organization is the national expert that did a similar study when Texas decided not to adopt the Common Core State Standards and needed to validate their standards.

She displayed a chart showing the 174 faculty respondents by course content area. Comments were solicited from UA's two-year and four-year programs and community campuses, as well as faculty from Alaska Pacific University, Wayland Baptist University, Ilisagvik College, AVTEC, the Northern Industrial Training Program, Alaska Christian College, and the Amundsen Educational Center. Input was solicited from this wide spectrum of faculty in the belief that Alaska students need to be prepared either for an academic career or to go on for further, current, technical education. She noted that including such a diversity of voices had not been done elsewhere in the country.

DR. HIRSHBERG explained that the first piece of the validity study looks at whether the standards are applicable to the course content areas. As might be expected, the math content standards were relevant to the math instructors and the language arts content standards were relevant to the English instructors, but there was more variation in what seemed relevant to somebody teaching other introductory courses. What was more relevant was to ask whether the standards, as a whole, would sufficiently prepare students for success in the respondent's course.

She highlighted that almost 50 percent of the respondents said that the new standards for English/language arts represent all of the knowledge and skills necessary for success in an entry-level course, and over 80 percent said the standards represent "most to all" the skills necessary for success. The response was even stronger for the mathematics standards.

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DR. HIRSHBERG said the respondents were also asked whether the English/language arts and mathematics standards reflect a sufficient level of cognitive demand for students who meet the standards to be prepared to succeed in the respondent's course. The answers were encouraging; 80 percent said the English/language arts standards are adequate in most of all of the areas necessary for success in an entry-level course at the university or in a technical training program. For mathematics, 85 percent of the respondents said the standards reflect most to all of the cognitive demand sufficient for students who meet the standards to be prepared to succeed in the respondent's course. These strong results support the veracity of the new standards raising students' skill levels to where they need to be, she said.

[2:50:07 PM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG addressed some of the comments that were made during the process. A number of people talked about the need for students to have technical and scientific reading skills and a technical vocabulary, and the board added in those areas. The request by a handful of people for more focus on reading and mathematical skills was met with the technical reading piece. In conclusion, she said that key question is whether the students will actually achieve the standards that have been set for them.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Dr. Hirshberg for the presentation.

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At ease

[3:01:22 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting and introduced Superintendent Graff.

[3:01:41 PM](#)

ED GRAFF, Superintendent, Anchorage School District (ASD), Anchorage, Alaska, thanked the committee for the opportunity to provide information about how ASD is implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and the continuing commitment to student success.

He stated that one of the immediate benefits of adopting the CCSS is the ability to collaborate with like-size districts. He explained that the ASD belongs to an organization called The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), which provides resources that range from professional development to curriculum alignment, as well as a think tank opportunity with other districts.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if he was referring to the Alaska Academic Standards.

SUPERINTENDENT GRAFF clarified that the Anchorage School District adopted and has implemented the Common Core State Standards. He added that those are not the standards that the state will use to assess the district, but they are substantially similar to the Alaska Academic Standards.

He continued to explain that by belonging to CGSC, the district has been able to use some of the resources they developed. He directed attention to a parent roadmap that describes areas of focus for each grade level and provides examples of the assessments as well as activities that are aligned to the standards. The roadmap is available in a number of different languages, which is helpful because ASD is a district of diverse languages.

SUPERINTENDENT GRAFF reported that the Anchorage School Board adopted the Common Core State Standards in the spring of 2011. He reviewed some of the key shifts from the old Alaska standards to CCSS. For language arts there is close reading of complex literary and informational texts, evidence-based writing, and a strong focus on vocabulary. In math there are fewer topics with more depth, there is a balance of concept and computation, and they include the standards of mathematical practice. He

highlighted that the curriculum is based on the standards, not textbooks.

[3:06:17 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked what that means.

SUPERINTENDENT GRAFF replied that there has been a misconception that CCSS comes with a set of texts that a district must use, but there is actually a great deal of flexibility in selecting textbooks. He noted that the district was going through a math review when the CCSS were adopted, so the district was very conscientious about the purchase of new math materials.

DARLA JONES, PhD., Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Instruction, Anchorage School District, said it was critical to follow a thorough curriculum alignment process when the district adopted the Common Core State Standards. Different approaches were utilized in English/language arts and math.

The Anchorage School District turned to the Basal Alignment Project for English/language arts, because that project recognizes the reality of budget challenges. The project allowed the district to use existing textbooks, collaborate with the CGCS and other districts across the country, and essentially rewrite existing test questions and identify vocabulary terms that would be more appropriate for the Common Core State Standards. She noted that the district decided to use Houghton Mifflin for the reading program and rework the approach.

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DR. JONES explained that the Anchorage School District partnered with the University of Texas Dana Center for professional development and to create new math units of study for all grade levels. Math is their primary area of expertise, and they provided a framework for transitioning to the new standards. During this process, 65 ASD educators engaged in an 18-month study of the math standards and the research behind the standards. This work guided an intense math review process for new resources at grades K-8. Many of these same educators became the site-based math specialists who help lead professional development efforts throughout the district.

She reported that ASD also created comprehensive academic plans that incorporate the Basal Alignment lessons and the math units of study. The academic plans provide information about learning outcomes for each quarter and identify essential concepts, essential vocabulary, instructional resources, and assessments.

She said that ASD is committed to revising the academic plans each year to better meet the needs of students at each grade level, and hopes to include more resources for teachers including more assessments and suggestions for differentiation for struggling readers, as well as those in need of enrichment. She noted that the academic plans are all available on the ASD website.

3:11:49 PM

DR. JONES said that ASD is developing academic plans for all subject areas as they incorporate the Common Core State Standards across all disciplines. For example, the Social Studies coordinator worked with ASD educators and key community members to produce the book *Picturing Anchorage* that is based on the Social Studies content standards, ASD's social/emotional learning standards, Alaska Cultural Standards, as well as the common core standards. She opined that this project illustrates how the CCSS provides a foundation that educators can use to create curricular resources that meet the needs of the community. She noted that the CCSS doesn't include things like a handwriting program, but ASD will continue their current program, because brain research has shown that there are major benefits to students in learning cursive.

3:13:30 PM

SUPERINTENDENT GRAFF highlighted that *Picturing Anchorage* addresses Senator Gardner's question about curriculum versus textbook. It supports the notion that the district is able to adjust and create resources.

He said that the last critical piece of the discussion centers on the assessments and what the updated assessment will look like. The shifts in instructional practices and curriculum are specifically based on increasing expectations of what students need to be able to know and do. Ultimately, the new assessment that the state adopts will be measuring that. It will be a new baseline for how to determine student success. It's not comparable to the past - it's a new baseline because of the new standards.

SUPERINTENDENT GRAFF displayed two sample practice questions for math that try to determine whether the student understands how to add fractions and the concept of greater than and less than. The first question is from the old Alaska assessment and the second is from the CCSS assessment. These examples show that the CCSS standards are more challenging.

Future considerations include the state assessment because that is the standard that ASD will be assessed on even though they adopted the CCSS. The district is cognizant of the differences, he said. The new assessments will utilize technology so the district has to be prepared for that. Finally, professional development will be an ongoing consideration.

[3:20:47 PM](#)

SUPERINTENDENT GRAFF concluded his comments by displaying a picture of an Anchorage kindergarten class and noted that they will graduate in 2026 having been exposed to the Common Core State Standards from kindergarten through 12th grade.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if there was a fiscal note or if the district had the resources in their budget to implement the assessment and teacher training.

SUPERINTENDENT GRAFF said the district does not have the resources in the budget, and he believes that without support for professional development, the state will fall short in addressing any standards. He noted that the district is also requesting an increase in bandwidth and double the amount during assessment windows.

[3:22:59 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the district would approach the governor and legislature once they know the cost of implementation.

SUPERINTENDENT GRAFF answered yes.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY expressed interest in receiving specific information on the total cost and a budget breakdown for implementing the CCSS, the assessments, technology, and staff development.

He also asked for follow up information about Dr. McCauley's testimony that 49 percent of the Alaska Academic Standards for math are different than the Common Core State Standards for math.

[3:27:37 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said he heard Superintendent Graff say that ASD adopted local standards before the state adopted the Alaska Academic Standards and they happened to be the Common Core State Standards. Superintendent Graff also said the district recognized, and was addressing, the differences between the

standards. Commissioner Hanley noted that he sent a letter to superintendents advising that if a district adopts a different set of standards they had a responsibility to address the Alaska Academic Standards, as well as the ones that were locally adopted.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if there's a disparity between ASD and the state in light of the testimony from Stanford and Massachusetts that the Common Core State Standards are minimal; they're better than the old Alaska standards but not as rigorous as the new Alaska Academic Standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY maintained that the standards are different, but equally rigorous.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked the presenters and recognized Pete Lewis.

[3:29:50 PM](#)

PETE LEWIS, Superintendent, Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) School District, Fairbanks, Alaska, introduced himself.

MELANIE HADAWAY, Secondary Curriculum Coordinator, Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) School District, Fairbanks, Alaska, introduced herself.

SUPERINTENDENT LEWIS stated that the Fairbanks School District has been vigorously implementing the Alaska Academic Standards for English/language arts, math and culture since they were adopted in 2012. The ongoing initiatives include aligning the curriculum, working on assessments, integrating technology, and providing professional development. He discussed the process in August 2012 to introduce the standards to all corners of the school district to ensure that expectations were clear and that the message from the administration was consistent.

MS. HADAWAY emphasized that this was a districtwide implementation, not just for teachers. She said they tried to focus on the shifts in English/language arts, especially in nonfiction texts. That means that reading and writing isn't solely the responsibility of the English teacher. The intention is to have students reading and writing difficult, challenging text in all curriculum areas.

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MS. HADAWAY reviewed some of the other districtwide initiatives. With support from DEED, the district had a week-long math institute for teachers looking at the new standards, especially

the mathematical practices. A literacy institute was attended by more than just English/language arts teachers to support the increased standards. The idea was for everyone to understand that the standards all work together to create a climate of high achievement. She summarized that the standards are the "what" and the curriculum helps figure out the "how."

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SUPERINTENDENT LEWIS explained that in 2011 the school district began to align its curriculum to Common Core State Standards, and then switched to align with the Alaska Academic Standards in 2013. Throughout, the curriculum has been aligned to the Alaska Cultural Standards. He said it's clear that some standards are more important or powerful and the district is focusing on those to provide a roadmap to aid in the mastery of other standards.

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SUPERINTENDENT LEWIS discussed the importance of providing teachers real-time support on curriculum. The district created K-12 content leadership teams that include teachers, parents, and the university. The curriculum department provides support, and principals facilitate and provide direction, in each content area. This process allows for changes to be made much more quickly than waiting six years for the next curriculum review.

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MS. HADAWAY directed attention to the supporting documents that show that when K-12 teachers reviewed the curriculum, including the recent revisions for career technical education and social studies, they found that the Alaska Academic Standards for literacy and math are at the core of the entire curriculum. They went through line-by-line comparing the new Alaska Academic Standards to see where the "what" was different. They wanted to see if anything was missing from the district's curriculum or if things they asked for weren't included. As Senator Dunleavy pointed out, there are different ways to interpret the different standards and they wanted to ensure that the teachers understood and were on the same page, not just in English/language arts and math, but in every area of the curriculum.

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SUPERINTENDENT LEWIS said that the district tried to identify power standards for ongoing benchmark assessments. The idea is to have multiple measures to determine whether a student has met the standards. Eventually those will be tied to the evaluation process. Sample assessments are available to teachers through

the district-created Edmodo site. Technology is an important aspect of the districtwide assessments.

MS. HADAWAY explained that students will still take the State Benchmark Assessment (SBA) this spring, but now they will be able to take the practice test online using Google forms. Students are able to practice and develop their skills, and it's also beneficial for teachers, as this is a new system for everyone. She explained that Google Lux uses a script called Flubaroo making it possible for the assessment results to be delivered to principals and teachers soon after the students complete the practice test.

SUPERINTENDENT LEWIS explained that a districtwide committee was formed to help transition to the new evaluation system. They've adopted the Charlotte Danielson model and are in the process of creating a system for gathering data on student performance that is fair and accurate across grade levels and content areas. The idea is to provide appropriate information to improve instruction that is aligned to the Alaska Academic Standards for English/language arts, math, and culture. The standards provide a clear target for that.

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SUPERINTENDENT LEWIS discussed the resources for success: funding, time, and professional development. He said funding is an issue and it's important to stay the course during this multiple year process. He noted that Massachusetts gave school districts the time to implement their standards correctly, and that's led to success. There's also a professional development component to ensure that everyone is adequately trained in order to be successful. The district wants to make sure it has the appropriate structure and support systems in place to ensure that both students and staff are successful. That being said, there has to be a balance between the assessment processes and different initiatives and a system that allows teachers the time to teach. He also spoke about the balance between local and state control and the balance between professional autonomy and ensuring that teachers are aiming at the targets. The district is committed to preparing their students so that they will have the opportunity to compete in a global society. He concluded the presentation by showing pictures of students in the district and reiterated the commitment to prepare them for success.

[3:50:06 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked how the district paid to send teachers to summer institutes for literacy, cultural responsibility and curriculum alignment.

MS. HADAWAY explained that the district partnered with DEED for the institutes; for the curriculum alignment they used curriculum professional development money to encourage teachers to come in over the summer for developing education credits with a district focus in mind.

[3:51:18 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Superintendent Lewis and Ms. Hadaway and welcomed Peggy Cowan and Lisa Skiles Parady.

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PEGGY COWAN, Superintendent, North Slope Borough School District, Barrow, Alaska, stated that the district is guided by the board-adopted strategic plan which is student-centered. She spoke to the following mission statement of the strategic plan:

Learning in our schools is rooted in the values, history and language of the Iñupiat. Students develop the academic and cultural skills and knowledge to be:

Critical and creative thinkers able to adapt in a changing environment and world;

Active, responsible, contributing members of their communities; and

Confident, healthy young adults, able to envision, plan and take control of their destiny.

SUPERINTENDENT COWAN said the district is mission driven and it has a mission-driven curriculum development process. The board wants students to have the outcomes that boards, parents, and legislators want for their children regardless of where they live. The mission articulates that, but also grounds the work in the place the students are from and their Iñupiat heritage.

She said the presentation today is about standards and how they inform curriculum development in one rural school district in Alaska. As she listened to the national conversation, a common misconception that is often associated with standards is that standards lead to standardization. She maintained that standards do not inherently lead to standardization of instructional delivery. We can expect students in Kaktovik and Boston that

have the same understanding and skills to be successful in careers or college in the 21st century, but standards do not have to be delivered in the same way. In actuality, standards provide targets that allow the instruction to be more flexible than before teachers had targets.

It used to be that the only way you could guarantee content coverage was to demand use of specific materials. Now with standards, districts and schools have flexibility in instruction to reach the targets established by their standards. The district's presentation illustrates that.

The district is using the new Alaska Academic Standards in the district's own way. These standards are more rigorous than in the past, which is good because the students are competing in a national and global market and need to be as well prepared as other states and regions. A huge change in benefit is that the new standards finally provide depth. They are no longer a mile wide and an inch deep; a common and accurate description of standards and curriculum in the past. This is especially sympathetic with our district's use of curriculum development guided by understanding by design. For example, the anchor standards in language arts give focus and emphasis.

She deferred to Dr. Parady to provide an explanation of the district's use of the state standards.

[3:51:58 PM](#)

LISA SKILES PARADY, PhD. Assistant Superintendent, North Slope Borough School District, Barrow, Alaska, delivered the presentation "Implementation Efforts & Considerations at the District Level."

DR. PARADY described the challenges that rural school districts face as extraordinary. The North Slope Borough School District has about 2,000 students. It is roadless and larger than 38 states the size of Minnesota. The smallest school in the district is Kaktovik with 60 students and the largest is in Barrow with 700 students. Technology logistics are particularly complex. Delivering services is daunting. In-service take an incredible amount of detail and all logistics can be very difficult ranging from heat, food service, busing, and travel.

The first goal is instructional focus. All students will reach their intellectual potential and achieve academic success through integrating the Iñupiat knowledge system into the core

content areas. That is referring to the state standard, the learning target the state has put forth for districts.

Bob Marzano, in *What Works in Schools: Translating Research Into Action*, said, "A guaranteed and viable curriculum is the number 1 school-level factor impacting student achievement." The opportunity to learn addresses the extent to which the curriculum in a school is guaranteed. That means that states and districts give clear guidance to teachers regarding the content to be addressed in specific courses at specific grade levels. Standards really ensure the opportunity for students to learn the "must knows" versus the "nice to knows." If students don't have that opportunity to learn the content expected of them, there is little chance that they will. Viable in this context means ensuring that the articulated curriculum content or the standards for a given course or given grade level can be adequately addressed in the time available. Thus, time and priority really must be given to teach students the "must knows."

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DR. PARADY said that curriculum needs to be coherent, inviting, thoughtful, and culturally relevant. Curriculum provides a plan to achieve designated goals; it is not a list of topics and related activities. She discussed the difference between curriculum and standards and explained that the North Slope Borough School District is using the new Alaska Academic Standards to inform the curriculum. The standard is what is taught, the curriculum is how it's taught, and the assessment shows whether the student learned what is taught.

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DR. PARADY discussed the three stages of backward design: 1) identify the desired results; 2) determine acceptable evidence; and 3) plan learning experiences and instruction. She drew an analogy between the blueprint for a house design and a model curriculum blueprint. She said you start with a floor plan and work to the finished product, which is what the North Slope School District has done. She displayed the district's five-year curriculum, alignment, integration and mapping structure (CAIM) plan and reiterated the statement by Superintendent Lewis that it doesn't happen in one year, because it's complex, resource intensive work. She explained that the school board approved the structural framework in 2009 and at that time the district created K-12 core content area teams to guide the process and ensure alignment with both the Alaska Academic Standards and the

Iñupiat Learning Framework. She reiterated that it was an expensive process that involved all certified staff.

DR. PARADY said that some NSBSD teachers worked on the development of the Alaska Academic Standards and she believes that the process was sound and transparent. The standards are closely aligned to the Common Core State Standards, but they were developed locally. She disputed the suggestion of federal overreach, and highlighted that the NSBSD curriculum continues to align to the Alaska Cultural Standards. She described the balance between Alaska Academic Standards and the Iñupiat Learning Framework as a marriage by design.

She displayed a chart that teachers use as a blueprint, starting with the particular program area. In the next level the balanced content standard and Iñupiat Learning Framework are used to develop overarching understandings and essential questions. The next level has the districtwide cornerstone assessment tasks, after which units are developed for either courses or grade levels. She described it as a complex process that involves integration of the standards throughout.

DR. PARADY quoted a teacher who observed that teachers are able to look at the new standards and break down the knowledge and skills necessary to show mastery of that standard. This wasn't possible under the old standards due to their lack of clarity.

DR. PARADY reviewed an interdisciplinary unit on surviving in the Arctic. It addresses literacy, science, and technology standards and is relevant knowledge. She directed attention to the Iñupiat Learning Framework and performance expectations for the unit and noted that they are equivalent to the performance expectations found in the Alaska Academic Standards for the Iñupiat language, history, and culture. She said the idea is for students to transfer this knowledge to other areas of learning. This empowers them as lifelong learners.

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DR. PARADY displayed a visual that illustrates the challenges that districts currently face with the recent changes in laws and regulations. She described the new standards as the building blocks for the changes and commended DEED for adopting them. She concluded her comments with a quote from a middle school teacher who said the new Alaska Academic Standards may not be perfect, but they're a step in the right direction.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Dr. Parady and Superintendent Cowan.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if the NSBSD saw the new Alaska Academic Standards on the horizon when the district adopted their five-year plan in 2009.

DR. PARADY explained that she initiated the process when she was recruited to the North Slope because the district didn't have a curriculum. She worked closely with DEED to understand their expectations and she learned there was movement on the rise to develop and adopt new standards. She said the North Slope Borough School District is ahead of other districts and it's been tremendously hard work.

[4:15:30 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if the cornerstone assessment tasks she described are routine classroom assessments and if they're different from Bright Beginnings Assessment.

DR. PARADY agreed they are different. She explained that the district has performance tests for in the classroom and they're in the process of creating districtwide tests.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY requested a copy of the district's budget to implement the standards, including staff development, curriculum changes, and technology.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTIS requested a copy for the House committee as well.

CHAIR STEVENS said his office would distribute it to the members.

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CHAIR STEVENS announced the committee would stand at-ease.

[4:24:24 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting and recognized Sunni Hilts and Norm Wooten.

SUNNI HILTS, President, Board of Directors, Association of Alaska School Boards, Seldovia, Alaska, introduced herself.

NORM WOOTEN, Director of School Improvement and Governmental Relations, Board of Directors, Association of Alaska School Boards, Kodiak, Alaska, introduced himself.

[4:25:12 PM](#)

MS. HILTS said she didn't mind being last in the roster of presenters as long as the children of Alaska and their education is first. She then read the following into the record:

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the new Alaska standards for English language arts and mathematics.

Our statewide organization and our member school districts have been involved in developing and implementing education standards for better than two decades. As an educator yourself, you are undoubtedly aware of the history of academic standards in Alaska - from the first standards developed in the 1990s under Governor Hickel, to those that followed in the wake of NCLB. Today, we have standards by which administrators, teachers, school boards and students are measured. And in each of those cases, we have usually set the bar higher each time the standards have been overhauled or amended.

AASB believes the Department of Education & Early Development did a good job in establishing the Alaska Education Standards in 2012. What our member districts are requesting are the resources and time to implement them efficiently and effectively, with common sense and continued emphasis on local participation - from parents, teachers and students. Alaska's K-12 students must be prepared for careers or college, and the new Alaska Education Standards can help in that preparation. But, only if they are wisely implemented.

If they are wisely implemented, Alaska can continue to strive for educational excellence. In the last decade, public schools as a whole have increased the high school graduation rate from about 60 percent to more than 71 percent statewide, with the five-year cohort approaching 75 percent in 2013. We have lowered the dropout rate to less than 5 percent. If we are to improve the standing of U.S. students in relation to their counterparts in other developed countries, and if we are to lower the remediation rate at our own Alaska colleges, then higher education standards are one answer.

Of course, standards are merely one part of the equation: School Districts must also develop a *curriculum* to teach the standards, provide teachers the *professional development* and *instructional strategies* so the

curriculum can reach the classroom, and provide the *assessments* necessary to gauge whether teachers are effective and students are learning. School districts are doing these important tasks all the time, but with the new standards, the urgency of the work and the workload itself has increased immensely.

Let's take one school district to illustrate the process of implementing the Alaska Education Standards: this school district is of moderate size for Alaska, is off the road system but connected by plane and ferry service, has a good graduation rate and a fairly stable workforce of administrators and teachers, even in the face of layoffs and budget reductions.

Like most districts, this one normally budgets money to conduct a curriculum review over a six-year period. If there are 200 different course offerings in the district, that means 35 of them, on average, are reviewed each year to assess the content being taught, the instructional materials being used and the training and development needed by staff. This schedule leaves the remaining staff to focus on teaching and increasing student performance.

That six-year cycle is now being crammed into two or three years because in addition to the new Alaska Education Standards, the State Board of Education & Early Development also changed the way staff is evaluated and student performance is measured. This new accountability system is to be implemented in 2015-16 when 20 percent of an educator's evaluation will be based on student growth. By 2018-19, student performance will compose 50 percent of an educator's evaluation. And districts must also gather input for each educator's evaluation from parents, students, community members and fellow educators.

At our recent Annual Conference, the member districts of AASB approved two resolutions that express their concerns regarding assessments in general and the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam in particular. I submit those resolutions separately for your information. In short, our members - your local school districts - are asking for help from EED to implement the standards and enable students to do the new online assessments. School boards are also asking the state to repeal the High School

Graduation Qualifying Exam because it is out of date, expensive and time-consuming. The resources - and the six school days devoted to the test each year - can be better used elsewhere, such as implementing the new Alaska standards.

Finally, I ask you to help us and the Department of Education provide the public with information to understand the new standards as they unfold in your communities. There will be many adjustments and - yes - some bumps in the road as teachers learn new lessons, districts acquire new curriculum and as students reach toward a higher level of learning.

But we know that our students get only one chance at a K-12 education. They will do what we expect them to do. If the adults in their life step up, so will they. At AASB, our mission is to advocate for children and youth by assisting school boards in providing quality public education, focused on student achievement, through effective local governance. Today, AASB would like to thank the State of Alaska for adopting higher education standards and for the Alaska Legislature for assisting school districts in implementing them. Thank you.

4:32:30 PM

CHAIR STEVENS asked if she would say that the districts that the Alaska Association of School Boards represents are consistent in their support for a common core program.

MS. HILTS clarified that they're in support of the Alaska Academic Standards.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY noted that the question was about support for the "common core program" and the response was specific to supporting the standards.

MR. WOOTEN confirmed support for more rigorous academic standards and the board is standing behind the standards the state has implemented.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if there is a cost to implementation that is being borne by school districts.

MR. WOOTEN replied the AASB supports the standards, but it recognizes that implementation has a fairly significant cost. What the committee heard from Anchorage, Fairbanks, and North

Slope is representative of the other school districts in the state.

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MS. HILTS added that as a school board member in a tiny Alaska community, she has spent hours trying to explain the standards, why they're used, and how they'll help Alaska students. She confirmed that implementing the new standards will take a lot of commitment and time and money.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY noted the testimony about the need to upgrade technology and asked if the assumption is that the assessments would be computerized.

MR. WOOTEN replied it's not only the assessment, but also the implementation of the curriculum that's based on technology.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY requested any fiscal information AASB has.

MR. WOOTEN agreed to pass the request along to the member districts. He added that the funding is coming out of the operational budget so it affects the classroom.

CHAIR STEVENS asked what the dropout rate was at the high point.

MR. WOOTEN offered to follow up with the exact number.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Ms. Hilts and Mr. Wooten.

[4:38:15 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS [adjourned] the meeting of the Senate Education Standing Committee at 4:38 p.m.